

Parental narratives around decision-making regarding secondary educational provision for
children with an Education, Health and Care plan

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Abstract

Everyone makes many decisions every day. Everything an individual says or does is the result of a decision, whether they are conscious of it or not. Some decisions involve a simple choice, whereas other decisions are more complex and challenging to make. Parents of children and young people (CYP) with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are legally entitled to be involved in the decision-making process of secondary educational provision (SEP) and can specifically name what school they would like their child to attend. Research into the experience of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP is limited. This research used narrative methods to explore the experiences of 4 parents of CYP with an EHCP who had recently gone through the process of choosing their preferred SEP. A social constructivist and relativist stance was taken in this research, and valued each parent's narrative as a unique and subjective experience of SEP decision-making. Data was collected using the method of narrative interview, and analysed using narrative oriented inquiry. Analysis of each narrative generated a range of findings, which are outlined and discussed; with tentative links made to existing research, theory and policy. The Findings are also explored with parents through member checking, and the place of the researcher in the research is discussed through reflexivity. Some limitations of this research are discussed, followed by some potential implications for educational psychology practice. This research then makes some suggestions for future research, and finishes by providing a conclusion.

Student declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.

This research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is provided within this thesis.

Lloyd Smith

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List of abbreviations

- SEP – Secondary educational provision
- CYP – Children and young people
- SEND or SEN – Special educational needs and disabilities
- CoP – Code of Practice (2015)
- EP – Educational psychologist
- LA – Local authority
- NA – Narrative analysis
- NI – Narrative interview
- NOI – Narrative oriented inquiry
- CASP – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
- SENCo – Special educational needs and disability coordinator
- SEMH – Social, emotional and mental health
- IPA – Interpretive phenomenological analysis
- TLG – The Listening Guide
- IP – Identity position
- PCP – Personal construct psychology

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction overview

This chapter will explore and discuss areas related to this research with the aim of putting it into context. To help guide the discussion, this research aims to answer the following research question: “what narratives do parents of children and young people (CYP) with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) provide when asked about their experience of decision-making of secondary educational provision (SEP)?”

This introduction starts with an outline of the research, which is followed by definitions of two key aspects of the research. Next, some relevant aspects of the researcher’s background related to the research will be discussed. This chapter then moves onto placing this research into context through existing literature related to the research question, focusing on transitions and factors that affect SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Next, the research rationale will be described, followed a definition of narratives. Finally, the approach taken in this research will be outlined and followed by a summary of the research aims.

1.2. Research outline

This research uses a narrative methodology to explore parental experience of decision-making regarding SEP for CYP with an EHCP.

The term SEP, within this research, refers to all the different types of schools CYP can attend as part of their statutory education (e.g. comprehensive, grammar, academy, specialist etc.). CYP between the ages of 11-16 years-old attend the SEP phase of education. Most of the

CYP referred to in this research are transitioning from primary to secondary phase of schooling, and are typically between 11-12 years-old.

An EHCP is a document that supports CYP up to the age of 25 who need more help than is normally provided through special educational needs support (Department for Education, 2015). An EHCP document specifies the educational, health and social needs of an individual so that they can be understood and supported by those who work around them. Further definitions related to this research will be discussed in the relevant sections below.

1.3. Placing this research into context

1.3.1. Researcher context.

The focus of this research is on parent experiences, but within the context of this study, this cannot be separated from the researcher and their own story. Yardley (2000) states that commitment to a specific topic is an essential quality of good qualitative research. To help understand the researcher's commitment and motivation for this research, some aspects of their history will now be explored.

The researcher is a trainee educational psychologist (EP) and this research has been completed as part of a professional doctorate in educational and child psychology. The researcher has held a number of roles involving direct experiences of working with parents of CYP with SEND. The researcher noticed that systems around CYP were increasingly providing parents with the autonomy to make their own decisions, that were sometimes complex and hard to understand, and often without further guidance or help. The increased autonomy around decision-making left some parents feeling confused and overwhelmed by the pressure of their increasing responsibility.

These experiences left the researcher with a sense of helplessness as they wanted to support the parents, but they felt unable to provide an informed perspective (Seligman, 1972).

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Reflecting on these experiences today as a trainee EP, the researcher recognised similar experiences during their involvement with EHCPs. For example, the researcher encountered some parents who were struggling to select a suitable SEP for their child and would ask for advice. The researcher experienced the internal conflict of wanting to help these parents, but also recognised the complex ethical and knowledge-based concerns involved in providing such advice. Watching parents struggle with these decisions, and feeling unable to support them, continues to have an effect on the researcher. These experiences created the motivation to conduct the current research,

Although these experiences motivated the researcher to conduct the current research, they could have also introduced some bias into the research. For example, the experiences of the researcher could have affected intersubjectivity during the research through identifying with the vulnerabilities of the participants (Finlay & Gough, 2008). Despite these potential issues, the researcher's experiences also potentially reduced the effects of bias through their motivation to attentively listen and ensure the parent voice was heard (Egan, 2017).

1.3.2. National and local context related to this research.

There are 271,200 CYP with an EHCP in England, which is 3.1% of the total pupil population (Department for Education, 2019). Legislation has historically placed parents of children with a statement or an EHCP within the decision-making process of secondary educational provision (Department for Education, 1994; 2015; 'Disability Discrimination Act', 1995; 'Education Act', 1981; 'Education Act', 1993; 'Education Act', 1996; 'Special Educational Needs and Disability Act', 2001.). Legislation has increased the parental role in decision-making over time; partly due to the influence of research like the OFSTED report (2010), which concluded that no one type of school (mainstream, specialist provision, or special) was more effective in meeting CYP needs.

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In 2014, government legislation brought in the Children and Families Act. Part of this new legislation was the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (CoP) and the introduction of EHCPs (Department for Education, 2015). This legislation states that all schools must have regard to the CoP when making decisions relating to CYP with SEND. The CoP promotes CYPs right to an inclusive education through a family-centred system; stating that local authorities (LAs) must ensure that CYP and their parents are included, and actively supported, in decisions around provision. The CoP also states the rights of families to have their voice heard about their choice of SEP, which is documented within an EHCP (Department for Education, 2015). Although these are explicit rights, LAs also have the right to refuse a parents' choice of SEP for a range of reasons, including, if a placement would be incompatible with the efficient education of others (Children and Families Act, 2014). This creates a potentially complex picture for parents in regards to their rights around SEP decision-making.

Research by Parsons, Lewis, Davison, Ellins, & Robertson (2009) suggests giving parents decision-making responsibilities has a positive impact on educational outcomes for children. Despite legislation and these reported benefits, a recent survey by the Department of Education reported that only 28% of parents of children with SEN feel fully involved in decisions about support for their child (Panayiotou, Newton, & Boulden, 2017). Exploring the reasons behind this perceived low level of parental involvement were not part of the study, but the researchers speculated it might be due to a communication issue.

Another political factor raised in the literature that could affect parental SEP decision-making was a reduction in government funding. Reductions in government funding have affected SEND support, despite the fact it is protected through legislation. Research has linked reduced government funding of SEND support to concerns about providing an inclusive education through mainstream provision (Norwich, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2017). These findings suggest concerns around reduced funding of SEND support could affect parental

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views of what types of educational provision might be suitable to meet their child's needs and change their SEP decision-making experience.

SEND support funding in England is suggested to vary by region, creating a “postcode lottery” that affects the level of support available to a child based on where they live (Kent, 2015). Reports that support this claim highlight that some LAs have had legal action taken against them for reducing SEN support budgets (TES News, 2018).

The availability of provision places is another aspect that can vary across regions within the UK and could have an effect on SEP decision-making. One example of this, from a local context, is provided by the LA where the researcher works as a trainee EP. The LA is reported to have around 300 CYP with SEND being educated at independent schools, or outside the LA, due to a shortage of provision places. This shortage of places could have limited the potential options of SEP available to choose from and affected the parental SEP decision-making experience.

1.4. Placing this research into context through existing literature.

1.4.1. Transitions.

The transition from primary to SEP placement can be a critical time for CYPs development. CYP with SEND are at an increased risk of becoming isolated and vulnerable in the face of change (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). Previous research has linked the success of SEP transitions to effects on academic performance and emotional wellbeing (Rice, Frederickson, Shelton, Riglin, & Ng-Knight, 2015). The benefits a well-managed transition can have on a child's development emphasises the importance of SEP choice and the parental role in SEP decision-making.

1.4.2. Factors affecting SEP decision-making.

The literature review conducted for the current research, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, did not reveal any existing studies exploring SEP decision-making

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by parents of CYP with an EHCP. The literature search did reveal an existing scoping literature review exploring factors that affected SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with SEND (Byrne, 2013). The focus of current research differs from the literature in Byrne's (2013) review, but they also share some similarities, which helped inform the design of the current research. The similarities and differences between the current research and Byrne's (2013) review will now be discussed.

Byrne's (2013) literature review did not find many studies conducted in England and included research from around the world (e.g. The United States of America, Australia and The Republic of Ireland). Literature included in Byrne's (2013) review used a range of qualitative and mixed methods research designs to explore factors that affected school choice and satisfaction among parents of CYP with SEN.

The current research shared some similarities with the literature in Byrne's (2013) review, such as; parental decision-making of educational provision; focused on parents of CYP with SEN, a group where some members could qualify for an EHCP; focused on the transition from primary to secondary phase of schooling.

The current research also differed from the literature in Byrne's (2013) review in several ways. The first of these differences was that research in Byrne's (2013) review focused on factors that can influence SEP decision-making. Although factors can provide some insights, isolating them from their context can potentially remove information that limits our understanding about how and why certain decisions are made.

Another key difference is that all the research in Byrne's (2013) review was conducted under a previous version of the CoP. The current CoP (2015) increased parent voice and autonomy during the SEP decision-making process when compared to previous versions of the

CoP, suggesting the experience of parents in the current research could differ from parents included in studies from Byrne's (2013) review.

The final key difference is that most of the research in Byrne's (2013) literature review focused on factors affecting decision-making, which could increase the influence of cognitive biases. Biases can be described as a pattern of thought that can be efficient and help to make decisions quickly, but can also distort thinking, and potentially affects a wide range of human judgements and decision-making (e.g. Gilovich, Griffin, & Kahneman, 2002). One example of a bias that could have affected the studies in Byrne's (2013) review is choice supportive bias, which is the idea that post-decision memories can distort facts to support a selected choice (Henkel & Mather, 2007; Svenson, Salo, & Lindholm, 2009). This suggests that the "factors" listed by parents in the literature could be distorted by biases to reflect the SEP they chose, or were allocated, rather than reflect the factors they considered during the decision-making process.

The similarities and differences between the current research and those in Byrne's (2013) literature review were used to inform the current research design, which is outlined in the summary of this section. Further insights from the literature in Byrne's (2013) review, based on the factors influencing SEP decision-making, were also used to inform the research design and will now be discussed.

Byrne's (2013) literature review highlighted a range of factors that could influence SEP decision-making, which were categorised into the variables of the parent, the child, the school and other factors. The key points from these categories will now be discussed, then linked to the current research in the summary.

1.4.2.1 Parent variables

Bagley and Woods (1998) identify two value perspectives that they suggest underpin parental school choice. The first is the instrumental-academic value perspective, which focuses

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on the acquisition of specific skills, outcomes and achievement. The second is intrinsic-personal/social value perspective, which focuses on a broader range of priorities that are centred around the general care, concern and support provided by a school. Bagley and Woods (1998) suggest the dominant view taken by parents of children with SEN is the intrinsic-personal/social perspective.

Byrne's (2013) review also revealed that happiness of CYP is a key priority for parents when making decisions about SEP, although how to define if a child is happy varies according to parent priorities. One way that research has explored different views of parental happiness is through socio-economic status. The literature suggests middle-class parents are more likely to perceive happiness by attending a desirable school and will work towards achieving this through questioning, interacting and having their voice heard within the system. In contrast, the literature suggests working-class parents may be happy to make decisions based on a child's short-term interests, and are less able to navigate the education "market"; with the increased potential for concerned professionals to become involved and influence the decision-making process.

1.4.2.2 *Child variables*

The two child variables of age and severity of SEN were raised as points that could potentially influence the parental decision-making process. Three studies in the review created links to parent preference for specialist provision as children get older, especially around the SEP transition age of 12-13 years old (Jenkinson, 1998; Kenny, Shevlin, Walsh, & McNeela, 2005; Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Byrne (2013) raises the potential issue that these studies were not conducted in the UK and may reflect significantly different education systems. For example, the UK is reported to have higher rates of inclusion within mainstream when compared to other countries around the world, which could affect parental preference for specialist provision.

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The nature and degree of a child's SEN was also a key factor mentioned by parents in a range of the literature (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Parsons et al., 2009). Overall, parents of children with SEND categorised as mild held positive views about mainstream education; while parents of children with a SEND, categorised as moderate or severe, felt that their child would be excluded from participating within mainstream education. Despite the potential variation in how the nature and degree of a child's SEN is categorised, it could be reasonable to suggest CYP with an EHCP would fall in the moderate to severe category. This could suggest that parents of CYP with an EHCP might prefer specialist provision, with concerns about their child being excluded from mainstream provision. Recent national statistics in England could support this suggestion, with an 8.4% drop in CYP with an EHCP attending state-funded (mainstream) secondary provision between 2010 and 2019 (Department for Education, 2019).

1.4.2.3 School variables

Parental views toward the different types of educational provision is another key factor raised in the literature as influencing their SEP decision-making. Parsons et al. (2009) found that parents of CYP with SEN were mostly satisfied with the support that their child received in a mainstream school.

A survey by Panayiotou et al (2017) revealed that parents of children with SEND in mainstream provision were less satisfied than parents with CYP in specialist provision, with parents raising concerns that mainstream schools did not know how to support their child. Parsons et al (2009) also found that parents with children in special educational provision were more satisfied with the support their child received compared to mainstream schools. Although the sample of parents in Parson et al's (2009) study, who were most satisfied, were biased towards children with profound forms of SEND and based their judgement on personal and

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social factors; reflecting the intrinsic-personal/social value perspective previously raised as influencing parental preference for specialist provision (Bagley & Woods, 1998).

Previous experience of education during primary provision was a factor raised in the literature that influenced parental SEP decision-making. Parental views in the literature of primary mainstream school were mostly positive, providing the academic and social support children with SEN needed (Jenkinson, 1998; Kenny et al., 2005; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Lorenz, 1998). Jenkinson (1998) found some parents chose a mainstream SEP based on their positive mainstream primary school experiences, but later moved their child to a specialist provision, due to a widening gap in academic and social expectations.

Staff beliefs were another school variable raised in the literature that could influence parental views and decision-making. For example, Lorenz (1998) looked at inclusion for children with Down Syndrome and found that staff beliefs around a particular form of SEN influenced parental decisions; emphasising the importance of staff knowledge around providing SEN support, and also highlighting the potential influence of staff views on the parental decision-making process of SEP.

1.4.2.4 Social influences on decision-making

Other factors of influence from the literature included a range of social factors, including a headteacher's speech, discussions with other parents of children with SEN and discussions with professionals (Byrne, 2013). Discussions with other parents were reported as having a mostly positive influence and were sometimes stated as a key source of information. In contrast, concerns were raised about the influence and power professionals could have during the decision-making process. For example, parents mentioned how school staff were reluctant to act on applications for SEN support and experienced feeling "powerless" when decisions were being made.

1.4.2.5 Summary

Byrne's (2013) scoping literature review revealed a range of factors that can influence parents of CYP with SEN when making decisions about SEP. These insights influenced the current research approach and design in several ways.

Research from Byrne's (2013) literature review suggests the severity of a child's SEN can have an influence on parental preference of school provision, with higher severity of need being linked to the expertise and resources available within specialist provision. CYP with an EHCP could be categorised as having an increased severity of SEN due to the higher level of need required to qualify for additional support. By focusing on CYP with an EHCP in this research, this could help develop our understanding of the suggested link between the of severity of SEN and SEP decision-making, while also exploring this link in context.

Literature in Byrne's (2013) review suggested parental preference for specialist provision increased as children get older, with the transition from primary to secondary school being a particularly important time when making decisions about educational provision. Based on this insight, the current research chose to focus on the transition to SEP, with the aim of furthering our understanding the parental experience of this potentially challenging decision.

Parental factors like attitudes towards provision, happiness and social influences were also suggested as potential sources of influence on the SEP decision-making process. These literature informed insights combine to highlight a complex range of factors that can influence parental experiences of SEP decision-making. This suggests the current research would benefit from taking an open approach to its design, selecting a methodology that can capture and analyse a broad and complex range of factors that could be involved during the SEP decision-making experience. An open research design could also capture the context in which decisions are made, furthering our understanding of parental experiences of choosing a SEP, while avoiding the potentially reductionist approach of relying solely on influential factors.

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As parents in this research were being asked to recall post-decision memories, consideration was given to the potential presence of bias in their responses. Bias can be difficult to identify, and challenging to overcome through research design. Consideration was given to involving parents who were going through the process of decision-making, rather than recalling post-decision memories, but concerns about bias would still exist. The current research made the decision that eliminating bias was not possible, but the research design could look to reduce its potential influence. This research aimed to focus on the overall parental experience of decision-making; reducing the need to focus on specific memories of decision-making that could increase the potential for bias, like the need to justify their final choice of SEP.

1.5. Research rationale

The rationale for this research combines a number of factors raised above. The researcher's own experience highlighted how parents can struggle with increased autonomy to make decisions without support and guidance. Exploration of the literature highlighted the importance of successful transitions to SEP and a range of factors that can influence the SEP decision-making process for parents of CYP with SEND. Combining these factors highlights the potentially complex and challenging range of demands placed on parents when they are provided with an increased level of autonomy to make decisions about SEP for CYP with SEND.

The literature review conducted for this research also highlighted that research involving parents of children with an EHCP around SEP decision-making is limited. The introduction of the CoP has seen an increase in autonomy for parents of CYP with an EHCP in the SEP decision-making process. Despite the positive intentions of providing parents with more autonomy around SEP decision-making, little is known through research about the experience of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. Exploring experience of SEP decision-making by parent of CYP with an EHCP could help develop our understanding

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of this social phenomena, while providing insights that could support parents during this process in the future. The focus on parent voice in this research could also inform and benefit aspects of practice promoted by the CoP, for example, the parent-partner relationship and multiagency working.

From the perspective of a trainee educational psychologist, this research has a number of potential benefits for practice. EPs frequently work with parents with the aim of eliciting their voice as part of their practice supporting CYP and their families. In addition to the benefits to practice raised above, the chance to hear extended narratives directly from parents is not always afforded in typical EP work. This research provides EPs with the opportunity to read, absorb and reflect on how parents of CYP with an EHCP construct their experience of the decision-making process.

1.6. Research approach

This research is based on social constructivist epistemology and a relativist ontology. This stance takes the perspective that no single “truth” of experience exists, valuing individual perception of experience to construct meaning and identity. The social constructivist epistemology that informs this research takes the view that individuals seek understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Individual prior knowledge and experience, determined by social and cultural factors, are selected and transformed to construct knowledge out of experience (Crotty, 1998). This allows the individual to go beyond the information provided to construct their own meaning and organise their experiences. This approach allows the current research to focus on how parents of CYP with an EHCP develop their own subjective meanings of the SEP decision-making experience through their stories and discourses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

1.7. Defining narrative

The term narrative has been described in many ways, but a general definition suggests it is a primary source of human knowing, providing access to human thoughts, concerns, actions and values (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The use of narratives in research has its origins in literary theory, but is being increasingly used for social research (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). There are many different definitions, but generally speaking, narrative analysis involves researchers interpreting shared stories of everyday life or told within the context of research (Parcell & Baker, 2017).

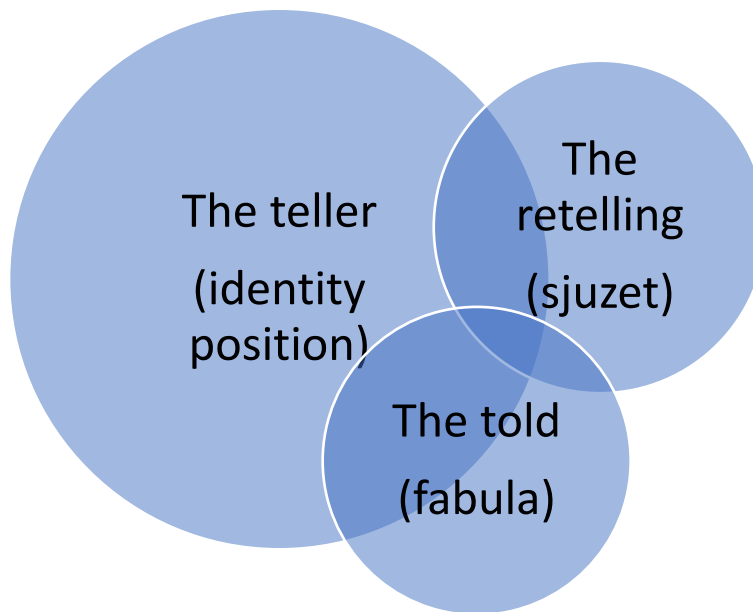
Central to interpretation in narrative research is the constructive role of language and its ability to provide an “order of meaning” to human consciousness (Crossley, 2000). An underlying assumption of narrative research is that humans are interpretive creatures who constantly reflect on what is happening around them. These reflections about experience are seen as meaningful, which can be explored through “meaning systems” and “structures” people create through language, in order to understand ourselves and others in the world (Crossley, 2000).

The primary source of data in narrative analysis comes in the form of stories through people’s text and talk (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Within narrative analysis, stories are a way of communicating ideas, thoughts, feelings, along with other aspects like social norms, morals and experiences (Hiles, Cermak, & Chrz, 2017). Many different sources of data in the form of stories can be used for narrative analysis, including, interviews, oral histories, journals, diaries, social media posts and speeches.

There are also many different forms of narrative analysis, each with their own framework, that are often adapted by researchers to fit their specific research. Interpretation using narrative analysis usually pays particular attention to the interconnection and relationship

between the “self” and other aspects like “language” and “social structures” (Crossley, 2000). Narrative analysis can focus on different aspects of a story, like how it is structured, its function or purpose, themes that emerge from the narrative, or how a story is told and by whom (Parcell & Baker, 2017).

The current research uses a narrative interview (NI) technique, paired with narrative oriented inquiry (NOI) for its analysis (Hiles et al., 2017; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). NI and NOI will be outlined in detail in the methodology and analysis sections of this research, but a brief outline of the NOI method will now be provided. NOI is a psychological approach that provides a dynamic framework for narrative inquiry. NOI views data not just as people telling stories, but as people actively engaging in narrative thinking so they can make sense of their being-in-the-world (Hiles et al., 2017). A key aspect of NOI is the idea of identity positioning, which refers to how a storyteller perceives their role and positions themselves within a story. NOI takes this idea of identity positioning and uses it within a framework the authors have labelled the teller, the retelling and the told (figure 1). In the context of stories, the told is what you hear. Behind the told is the retelling, which is how the specific story is being told, like through the differences in language used or how the story is presented. Behind both the retelling and the told is the teller, the person the story originates from. The NOI method looks to explore the interaction between these layers, and how they affect each other, through the analysis of narrative data.

1.7.1. Figure 1. The teller, the retelling and the told relationships in narratives**1.8. Research aims and question**

This research aims to explore experiences around SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. In line with the social constructivist approach of this research, the decision was made to keep the research questions as open as possible, which resulted in the development of a single research question:

“What narratives do parents of children with an EHCP provide when asked about their experience of the decision-making process of SEP?”

This open and exploratory approach allowed parents of CYP with an EHCP to provide their own perspectives of the SEP decision-making experience, while providing insights into an under-explored area of the literature. The researcher acknowledges that the open nature of the question could produce a diverse range of responses from the parents in this study, and they may not always be directly about decision-making. The open nature of the research question could empower parents of CYP with an EHCP to express their own subjective experiences,

which could inform our understanding of SEP decision-making, and was seen as a strength of this research.

1.9. Introduction summary

This introduction has placed the current research into a range of contexts. The researcher outlined their previous experience of witnessing parents of CYP with SEND struggle with decision-making. A range of factors that can influence the SEP decision-making process by parents of CYP with SEN were outlined, although little is known about their overall experience of SEP decision-making. In addition, no research has focused on SEP decision-making since the introduction of the new CoP and EHCPs. The research rationale was outlined through the researcher's own experience, gaps in the literature and how EPs may benefit from reflecting on parental experiences of the SEP decision-making process. A definition of narrative was provided, along with an outline of the NOI method used in this research, and its focus on identity positioning. The relativist and social constructivist stance taken in this research was stated and related to exploring parental narratives of the SEP decision-making experience. Finally, the research aims and question were outlined; with the potential implication that parental narratives may not always involve direct experiences of SEP decision-making because of the open question used in this research, and the subjective meaning making of the parents involved.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter starts by discussing the initial stages of the literature search and the discovery of an existing scoping literature review on parental decision-making of SEP for CYP with SEN. This chapter then describes a systematic literature review conducted for this research, focusing on the question, "what are parent and professional experiences of the new CoP and EHCPs?" This question is used to describe, critique and analyse the literature from

the search. This chapter concludes by summarising the findings from the systematic literature review and discusses its impact on the approach used in the current research.

2.2. Initial literature search and scoping literature paper

A literature search for decision-making of SEP by parents of CYP with an EHCP revealed no research and highlighted a gap in the literature. By removing the term “EHCP” and including the term “SEN” in the search, this revealed 14 papers in peer reviewed journals. This search revealed an existing scoping literature review of factors affecting parental decision-making of SEP by Byrne (2013). After reviewing the literature search results, it was concluded that carrying out the same search in 2019 would not be distinct as the majority of the research papers were included in Byrne's (2013) review. Therefore, the decision was made to widen the literature search question. To help inform the widened search, Byrne's (2013) paper was reviewed, as outlined in the introduction.

2.3. Literature search question development

Two gaps in the literature were revealed when comparing the focus of the current research to Byrne's (2013) literature review. The absence of the CoP and EHCPs in literature about SEP decision-making influenced the current literature search to focus on these areas. The CoP and EHCP process promote multiagency working that requires direct involvement from a potentially wide range of professionals who can influence the SEP decision-making process. Combining these insights generated the literature search question “what are the experiences of parents and professionals of the CoP and the EHCP process?”

2.4. Literature search

A literature search was conducted in August 2019 and reviewed in January 2020. The databases within EBSCO services and Scopus were used for the search. The EBSCO services database search included Academic Search complete, British Education Index, Child

Development and Adolescent Studies, CINHAL Plus with Full Text, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsychARTICLES and PsychINFO.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were created and are outlined in appendix A. The search terms were “education, health and care plan” OR “education, health and care” OR “Education, health and care assessment” OR “special educational needs and disabilities code of practice” OR “SEND code of practice 2015” OR “SEND code of practice” OR “SEND CoP”.

The EBSCO databases generated 215 papers and Scopus generated 42 papers. After removing duplicate entries within each database, this left a total of 50 papers from EBSCO and 42 papers from Scopus. Titles and abstracts of the 92 papers were then reviewed for relevance to the literature search criteria and any duplicates between the two databases removed, which left a total of 21 papers. The remaining 21 papers were then subjected to a more detailed review, which was supported through the use of two tools; the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined in appendix A, was used to ensure only relevant literature was included in the final review list; the first two questions of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used as a way of systematically appraising qualitative research (CASP, 2018). The first two questions of the CASP checklist were used to screen each paper to ensure their research aims were clear, and check the methodology used in each of the 21 research papers was an appropriate way of addressing the research goal. This process removed 12 papers from the initial total of 21 and left a total of nine papers to be included in the literature review. The final nine papers were each read multiple times, analysed using the literature search question, and systematically appraised using all 10 questions of the CASP. An overview of the appraisal and analysis points generated using this process for all nine papers included in the literature review are provided in appendix B.

2.5. Overview and critique of the literature

This section describes and critiques the aims and methodology for each of the papers included in the literature search.

2.6. Table 1. *Research Papers Included in the Literature Review*

Research paper title	Author(s) and publication year
"Professionals' views on the new policy for special educational needs in England: ideology versus implementation (2019)	Palikara, Castro, Gaona, & Eirinaki (2019)
'Forget the Health and Care and just call them Education Plans': SENCOs' perspectives on Education, Health and Care plans	Boesley & Crane (2018)
Developing an Individualised Assessment for KS1 & 2 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties	Stelmaszczyk (2018)
Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives	Sales & Vincent (2018)
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCOs' perspectives of the first six month	Curran, Mortimore, & Riddell (2017)
Research paper title	Author(s) and publication year
'The SEND Code of Practice has given me clout': a phenomenological study illustrating how SENCOs managed the introduction of the SEND reforms	Curran (2019)

A review of parent-professional partnerships and some new obligations and concerns arising from the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice 2015	Hellawell (2017)
An ethical audit of the SEND CoP 2015: professional partnership working and the division of ethical labour	Hellawell (2019)
A tale of three SENCOs, post 2015 reforms	Whalley (2018)

Palikara, Castro, Gaona and Vasiliki (2019) used a mixed methods approach to study professionals' views on the new policy for SEND provision. The study focused on areas of change from the old policy and training professionals had received in relation to the new policy. Palikara et al's (2019) study used an online semi-structured questionnaire and rating scales developed from existing literature and adapted through a piloting scheme to improve construct validity. The study involved gaining the views of 349 individuals from a broad range of professionals working with CYP with SEN. The professionals were recruited from 3000 of the researcher's "contacts", with only just above 10% responding and being involved in the research. No further details were provided about how these contacts were made. Most of the participants were female and from London and the south-east of England. These factors about the sample combined raise questions about sample bias and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Palikara et al. (2019) used inductive thematic analysis on the qualitative comments from participants gathered in an open text box during an online interview. No details were provided about what questions were asked or how the analysis was completed, raising potential concerns about validity through interpretation (Maxwell, 1992). A one way-ANOVA and post hoc tests were used to test differences of view between groups on aspects of the new policy. No mention

is made of how the data collection was handled or stored, but this might be included in the process of ethical approval highlighted by the researchers.

Boesley and Crane (2018) used semi structured telephone interviews to explore the perspectives of 16 primary and secondary SENCOs on the implementation of EHCPs. 12 of these SENCOs worked in primary schools, skewing the sample towards this group. 15 of the 16 SENCOs in the study were female, highlighting the potential of bias within the sample, but establishing representativeness of the sample is difficult as the sex of those in SENCo roles are not a recorded statistic. Through use of the CASP framework (2018), it revealed that the researchers said the interview questions were developed using existing literature on EHCPs, but quotes research that goes back as far as 2009, predating its conception and introduction. The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis and an essentialist framework. The analytic stages are outlined, but no further details about the process were provided (e.g. data audit trail). The authors do not acknowledge any potential effects of their presence in the telephone interview or own their perspective in the analytic process.

Stelmaszczyk's (2018) research focused on the development of a whole-school, whole-curriculum assessment approach that would track and record progress against EHCP short- and long-term outcomes. This study used a narrative style adopted by a member of the senior leadership team in a maintained primary special school. The researcher does not directly mention any ethical issues related to the research. This is a direct account of one SEN primary school's journey, which could give it credibility, but it could also question its transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All students at the school in question had an EHCP, which makes the need to develop the system even more important. Not all schools will have such a high level of CYP with EHCPs to implement such a system. An additional factor is that the assessment system is not publicly available. These practical and

environmental limitations when tracking outcomes were raised through the CASP (2018) framework and could limit its benefit to other schools.

Sales and Vincent's (2018) study aimed to reveal the effectiveness of the new CoP reforms and the extent to which EHCPs have successfully addressed shortcomings of the previous Statements of SEN. The study used face-to-face interviews with 11 participants and a focus group with five participants to gain the views of parents and professionals. The small sample groups for the different methodologies raises questions about its transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Applying the CASP framework (2018) to this study raised concerns about the parent sample used in this study, who were sourced from a local parent partnership group, which could suggest these parents were engaged with the broader system and aware of sources of support that could benefit them during the EHCP process; potentially excluding parents who were unable or unwilling to engage, or those who were just not aware of available sources of support. The researchers do not directly outline how questions for the research were established, but do cover some associated previous research and mention the areas of focus for the interviews and focus group. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyse the data and suggest it was guided by key research questions, which are not stated, highlighting a potential threat to validity through interpretation (Maxwell, 1992). The researchers do not mention their own role throughout the research, which has the potential to threaten validity through researcher bias on aspects like the formation of questions, the data collection process and the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Curran's (2019) phenomenological study aimed to explore the role of the SENCO using Ball, Maguire and Braun's (2012) policy actor typology. This study was the third phase in a five-phase study for a PhD thesis. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with nine SENCOs over the course of a year. Details of how the participants were contacted are not provided. Participants were working in mainstream primary and secondary schools and had

achieved the National Award for SEN. Eight of the SENCOs had one year's experience in the role, with the researchers stating that this is likely due to the sampling method, but do not provide any further detail for this reasoning. The researchers mentioned the sample aims to be representative, but questions could be raised whether the majority of SENCOs with 1 years' experience could be classed as representative.

Questions in the interview were informed by the previous two phases of the PhD thesis, but are not detailed in the paper. The interview schedule was piloted with 13 educational professionals, but there is no mention of any adjustments made as a result. Interviews were conducted by telephone or using online methods. The researchers do not mention how data was collected, but do mention that the data was transcribed, raising potential validity concerns through description (Maxwell, 1992). The research uses a thematic analysis approach, combined with Ball et al's (2012) policy actor typology. The CASP framework (2018) raised concerns that the researchers did not acknowledge their role throughout the research, or check with participants about their application of Ball et al's (2012) policy actor typology to ensure it was reflective of their experience.

Curran, Mortimore and Riddle's (2017) research aimed to explore and analyse in-depth experiences of the SENCo as policy implementor during the first-year post-reforms. The research paper focuses on phase four of a five phase PhD research project. The researchers used questionnaires with open and closed questions to explore the views of 74 SENCOs. Participants were recruited using online methods and LA contacts. The researchers mention that the questionnaire was administered online but further details are not provided. The majority of the participants (51%) came from the south-west and included a LA pathfinder, suggesting a potential sampling bias and potential concerns about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers mention they created the questionnaire by cross referencing themes from early phases of the research. Earlier phases of the research involved fewer

participants and the researchers wanted to see if individual narratives reflected wider views. With only 74 SENCOs in the study, the researchers highlight this is still a small study, although the researchers do point to other studies with similar results to support their findings. The research does not mention any ethical considerations, but these might have been mentioned in other phases and are likely to be part of the PhD thesis process. The researchers also do not mention the form or process of analysis performed on the data, raising questions about validity through interpretation (Maxwell, 1992).

Hellawell (2017; 2019) produced two research papers based on the same data collected as part of a larger project, with the CASP (2018) framework highlighting concerns about utilising selective data for each research paper according to its focus. Hellawell's (2017) research used exploratory semi-structured interviews to explore the early experiences of 16 professionals working under the new CoP in relation to parent-professional partnerships. Use of the CASP framework (2018) raised concerns about bias in the sample as the participants in this study as they were recruited using a snowballing system based on the first three participants, who were personal contacts of the researcher. The research does not mention the locality of the participants, which combined with the points above, could question its transferability. The paper also does not provide details about how the interviews were conducted, or how data was collected, which could raise questions about dependability and validity through description (Maxwell, 1992). Hellawell (2017) used constructivist grounded theory approaches to analyse data from professionals' responses to questions about their early experiences of intensified partnership working under the new CoP, and new challenges they encountered due to the CoP and their ethical concerns related to the CoP. Hellawell (2019) also used the same participant data to conducted research on the ethical challenges of professionals working with the new CoP, suggesting similar concerns exist about trustworthiness of the

research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hellowell (2019) used interpretive semi-structured interviews to explore participants' views on the same questions used in the 2017 study. This research also used constructivist grounded theory to thematically analyse the data. The researcher then employed Cribb and Ball's (2005) ethical audit framework, using the three lenses of goals, obligations and dispositions to explore the data further.

Whalley (2018) conducted inclusive research that used semi-structured interviews to explore the views of three SENCOs in relation to being 'agents of change'. SENCOs were all new to the role, with less than 18 months experience and came from early years, primary and secondary mainstream schools. The researcher acknowledges they were a tutor on a National Award for SENCOs course, which all the participants were attending. This raises concern about responder bias, which could involve the "good bunny" syndrome where the participants give answers they think the researcher wants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These biases, combined with the small sample and localised nature of the participants, could also question the research transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded and then transcribed. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

This concludes the description and critique for each of the papers included in the literature search. This research will now synthesize, discuss and critique the key themes from the findings of the research.

2.7. Literature search findings themes

2.7.1. Transitions from statements of SEN to EHCPs

The majority of participants from studies in this literature review felt EHCPs introduced new and important qualities that better address children and young people's (CYP) needs. Palikara et al. (2019) found that 67% of participants in their study reported they agreed with replacing statements of SEN with EHCPs, although the potential of sample bias from this study could question its transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). SENCOs in Boesley and Crane's

(2018) study reported that the EHCP system had potential and most of the participants expressed a willingness for it to work.

EHCPs were described as being more person-centred, holistic, with an increased focus on families, parental coproduction and outcomes; creating a clearer and fuller picture of CYPs strengths and needs compared to Statements of SEN (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019). Although Palikara et al's (2019) study was conducted online using multiple choice questions, which could have hidden the potential subtleties in professionals' answers to these questions.

In contrast, Palikara et al's (2019) study found around a third of participants were either neutral or negative about the change to EHCPs and its ability to provide a clearer picture. Palikara et al (2019) also found EPs were significantly less positive than SENCOs about the ability of EHCPs to provide a clearer picture of CYP, although the online survey did not reveal the reasons behind these results. Views in the literature also suggested that EHCPs were not that different from Statements of SEN, with most of the changes being administrative, although EHCPs were reported to take longer to complete (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019).

One potential reason behind these reported challenges with EHCPs is the reported lack of clarity and guidance in the CoP (Curran, 2019; Curran et al., 2017; Hellawell, 2017, 2019; Whalley, 2018). SENCOs from Curran et al's (2017) study reported confusion around the requirements and practicalities of the reforms; being introduced at the same time as the new curriculum, which often took priority, and added to the confusion. Equally, the SENCOs in Whalley's (2018) study suggested that the sudden requirement to enact the CoP changes were a barrier to its implementation; although the three SENCOs in this study were all relatively new to the role and still studying for a NASENCo qualification, potentially making changes difficult to understand and adjust to. In contrast, some SENCOs and professionals felt the generality of

guidance provided them with opportunity and freedom to take charge of the process and address the individual needs of CYP and their families (Curran, 2019).

The majority of SENCOs from the literature stated they would have preferred a gradual introduction of the reforms to allow them to implement effective changes within their school. Boesley and Crane (2018) found that some SENCOs believed that EHCPs were implemented too early and required frequent changes in what seemed like an ever-evolving process. In addition, SENCOs and professionals raised concern around the lack of consistency and discrepancies between different local authorities in the way they approached and supported the EHCP process (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018). Although the regional differences seen in the EHCP process, combined with the sample bias raised for all three of the studies referenced above, increases the threats to validity and transferability of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.7.2. Training and support for the CoP and EHCP changes

Reports suggest SENCOs varied in their need of support to implement the changes brought about by the CoP. Palikara et al (2019) found 55% of their participants reported adequate training for the EHCP process, while 42% felt more information and training should have been provided. Palikara et al's (2019) study involved a wide range of professionals, but they did not provide a breakdown of their percentages by profession. This lack of data could have potentially hidden variations in experience of training for certain professions, which could have developed our understanding within their findings.

Curran et al. (2017) found that 40% of SENCOs were satisfied, while 40% were not satisfied, with the level of support they had received during the transition to EHCPs. The previously raised concern about regional variation in support and practice could have implications for Curran et al (2017) study as over half the sample came from the same region of the country. The additional fact that many of the SENCOs were confused about the

frequently changing reforms, could also mean the SENCOs who were satisfied, did not know what forms of support and training were available and how it could help their practice (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019).

76% of SENCOs in Curran et al's (2017) study mentioned they had received support from their LA and 49% said this was their main source of support; although the study also reported that 72% of the SENCOs had received support and advice from other SENCOs. These results suggest SENCOs relied on their LA to inform and guide them through the complex and developing process of EHCPs. It is worth noting that over half of Curran et al's (2017) sample came from the same region in the south-west and may reflect the quality of support in that area. In contrast to these reports, some SENCOs in Curran et al's (2017) study stated that they had disengaged with LA support as they did not find it useful; with some SENCOs determining priorities and making decisions in isolation.

Professionals in Palikara et al's (2019) study also expressed concerns that the individuals' writing EHCPs might have little training or knowledge of SEND. This would often be SEN caseworkers, who in Hellawell's (2019) study, suggested they needed fewer skills for writing EHCPs when compared to Statements of SEN. SEN caseworkers were not represented in Palikara et al's (2019) study, and are generally underrepresented in the literature as a whole, which could limit our understanding of these findings.

2.7.3. The SENCO role and positioning through the new CoP

SENCOs in a few studies suggested they struggled to communicate changes, influence staff and gain their support for the new reforms (Curran, 2019; Hellawell, 2019). Curran (2019) does note that many of the SENCOs in the study had less than one year's experience, which may have affected their influence on staff as they establish themselves in the role. Hellawell (2019) also highlights that change can be a daunting prospect; generating feelings like a loss

of control, and potentially reducing the influence of the SENCo outside of their perceived status.

Curran's (2019) study highlighted a range of roles SENCos were positioned into by the CoP. As well as being positioned themselves, some SENCos believed the CoP has given them “clout”, enabling them to position others within school to implement effective change (Curran, 2019). One example of this was increased teacher awareness of their accountability and responsibility for CYP with SEN and their learning; with teachers becoming more proactive, and developing stronger relationships with pupils and parents (Curran et al., 2017; Hellowell, 2019). The absence of pupils and parents within the samples of these studies, as highlighted through the use of the CASP (2018) framework, potentially limits the validity of the claims made about stronger relationships.

2.7.4. Redefining SEN and SEN support

A few of the studies in this review stated how definitions of SEN had changed since the introduction of the CoP and the EHCP process. A range of different professionals mentioned that changes in qualifying criteria for SEN, SEN support and EHCPs meant the threshold had increased (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017; Palikara et al., 2019). This left some potentially vulnerable children in the mainstream system without support that could meet their needs (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017). Curran et al (2017) found 63% of SENCOS in the study had reduced their SEN register since September 2014, with 82% of SENCOS stating that it was a direct result of the CoP. A change in the definition of SEN and SEN support were suggested as the main reason for the reduction.

A reported positive aspect of SENCOS focusing on the SEN register was that it allowed them time to review and assess the size of the SEN register for potentially alternative reasons other than SEN (Curran et al., 2017). For example, SENCOS stated that a lack of effective teaching could falsely identify a student with SEN.

2.7.5. CYP's needs and the EHCP process

SENCOs in Boesley and Crane's (2018) study raised concerns that the criteria used to judge EHCP applications was unclear, lacked transparency and could be confusing. Although the SENCOs did acknowledge that judging CYP needs can be complex and requires a wide and varied judgment criterion. The SENCOs also mentioned that refusals for EHCPs were often poorly explained, leaving many parents feeling disregarded, ignored and confused.

Seven out of the nine professionals in Sales & Vincent's (2018) study raised concerns that decisions on EHC applications were not always based on the child's needs; suggesting the "profile" of a specific child, for example being in LA care, could make it more likely for them to be issued with an EHCP.

SENCOs in a few studies raised concerns that EHCPs took a narrow focus by valuing academic and curriculum based needs and undervaluing other potential areas like social and emotional needs (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Whalley, 2018). SENCOs also raised concerns about the emotional well-being and mental health of CYP with SEMH, stating they needed to reach a crisis point before their needs were taken seriously enough to be involved in the EHCP process.

2.7.6. Outcomes and provision

Some professionals stated that the move away from provision, to a focus on outcomes in EHCPs, could have positive benefits for CYP (Hellowell, 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018). Most of the professionals in Hellowell's (2017) study stated that parents felt more informed through a focus on outcomes in EHCPs and frequently expressed their entitlement to provision. Professionals considered some requests for specific types of provision as inappropriate for a child's needs; raising concerns about gaining a balance between the moral necessity to engage in partnership with parents to produce child-centred outcomes, while managing expectations around provision. Hellowell's (2017) study was conducted when the CoP was introduced,

which could suggest the concerns raised reflect a lack of information and training, rather than practice. A potential example of this was revealed when using the CASP framework (2018); Hellawell's (2017) study used quotes from a SEN caseworker to support the idea of parents requesting potentially inappropriate outcomes, but no further details are provided about these participants in the sample. Concerns have been raised about the lack of training and experience SEN caseworker, but they are also an underrepresented group in the literature (Palikara et al., 2019). A lack of training could have affected the concerns raised by the SEN caseworkers in Hellawell's (2017) study, and may not be reflective of experiences from other professionals. These points raise further concerns about credibility and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Professionals in a few of the studies raised some ethical dilemmas when creating outcomes (Curran, 2019; Hellawell, 2017, 2019). Professionals are required to set outcomes that are ambitious, be accountable for their achievement, while being mindful of certain constraints from the wider system such as budgets (Curran, 2019; Hellawell, 2017, 2019). This can place a heavy emotional demand on some professionals, while others seemed indifferent to the accountability and scrutiny associated with outcomes.

Part of the accountability of outcomes involves tracking progress over time. A study by Stelmaszczyk (2018) provided a narrative account of one SEN school's journey to track short and long-term outcomes that could be easily accessed by teachers and parents alike. By creating an assessment system, they were able to track outcomes that revealed 89% to 94% of pupils had achieved or exceeded their expectations in relation to their agreed outcomes. These high stated percentages could suggest visibility of this data had a positive benefit on CYP outcomes. There are some potential limitations to these findings as the study does not detail what outcomes were tracked, how they were selected and over what timeframe. An additional limitation is that the new assessment system was not compared to previous systems due to a

lack of data. Participants in Sales and Vincent's (2018) study supported these concerns and raised a number of issues when establishing outcomes, including, inconsistencies in definition, lack of specificity, were not always based on need and were not always measurable. These concerns, combined with the fact it is one school's account of outcome tracking, potentially limits the interpretation and application of these findings to other contexts; raising concerns about the trustworthiness of this research as highlighted through the use of the CASP (2018).

2.7.7. Choice and decision-making

Linked to concerns about outcomes, Professionals in Hellowell's (2017) study raised concerns about the lack of clarity and language around choice and preference used by the CoP. Parents are led to believe that they are “private consumers” who have greater choice in all aspects of their child's education, including the setting they attend, the support they receive and associated provision. Reports suggest unmet parental choices can lead to disputes, with claims from parents that professionals do not care (Hellowell, 2017).

2.7.8. Multiagency working

In principle, the assessment of SEND involving education, health and care services is well supported in the literature (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hellowell, 2019; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018). Parents and professionals stated their support for multiagency working, suggesting that working together effectively to coproduce a child-centred EHCP, could generate positive outcomes and is of ethical value (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hellowell, 2019; Palikara et al., 2019a; Sales & Vincent, 2018). SENCOs from Boesley and Crane's (2018) research highlighted some good multiagency practice between parents, the LA, the specialist teaching team and educational psychology.

In contrast, Sales and Vincent (2018) found that some parents had to be proactive to facilitate multiagency working; requiring knowledge, confidence, the ability to engage professionals and organise the process. Through the use of the CASP (2018) framework, Sales

& Vincent's (2018) study was revealed to only included a small sample of parents and their experiences may not reflect wider issues in the system. Additional influential factors, like parental knowledge and engagement, are explored further in the parental partnership section of this paper.

2.7.8.1 *Involvement of health and care.*

Some concerns were raised in the literature about the involvement of health and care services in EHCPs. A few professionals in Palikara et al's (2019) study stated that statutory assessment was still mainly education based and suggested that having “health and care” in the title gave the false impression about their involvement. SENCOs in Boesley and Crane's (2018) study agreed with this, which was reflected in the research title, “Forget health and care and just call them Education Plans”. SENCOs in Boesley and Crane's (2018) study suggested that involvement from health professions was mostly limited to submitting reports. This often left SENCOs to manage parent misconceptions, and their experiences of disengagement, around the involvement of health services during the EHCP process.

2.7.8.2 *Multiagency meetings.*

Reports from Sales and Vincent's (2018) and Palikara et al's (2019) studies mentioned that it was often difficult to coordinate meetings involving all professionals, with some not turning up to meetings, despite them being planned in advance. Professionals mentioned the high level of EHCP cases and time pressures as contributing factors that made attending meetings a struggle (Sales & Vincent, 2018). This often left others' in the system, like SENCOs and parents, with the responsibility of organising and arranging multiagency meetings, ensuring meetings were well attended (Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

2.7.8.3 *Variations in practice between and within professions.*

Variations in practice by individual professionals was also raised as a concern. SENCOs in Boesley and Crane's (2018) reported incorrect referrals from professionals, like doctors

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telling parents that their child needed an EHCP when they did not. This variation in practice was reported to have had a negative impact on parental expectations and generated feelings of them being treated unfairly.

Hellawell's (2017) study found different professions often understood and approached the EHCP process differently. This sometimes resulted in difficulties with multiagency working, and occasionally created a culture a blame between professionals. Hellawell (2019) states that multiagency working requires professionals to consider the discourses, systems and practices of other professions. Professionals must also balance their own identities, and practices as autonomous experts, with a knowledge base that needs to take a child-centred and collaborative approach to their work (Hellawell, 2019). Both of Hellawell's (2017, 2019) studies were conducted during the introduction of the CoP and might reflect the temporal context of the research; a time when learning about the practices of different professionals might be a low priority, when compared to learning about other aspects of implementing the CoP. This could suggest both of Hellawell's (2017, 2019) studies may not reflect the current experiences and views of professionals around multiagency working.

2.7.9. Parent partnerships

Involving parents in the EHCP process is generally supported in the literature, with some suggesting it has had the greatest impact of all the reforms (Curran et al., 2017; Sales & Vincent, 2018). Parents were reported to like the formality of the EHCP process, feeling more informed, engaged, included and valued as a result.

In contrast, some SENCOs reported that parents did not understand the EHCP process. This potentially leaving parents feeling confused, anxious and in need of support (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017). Confusion about EHCPs is suggested to have contributed towards difficulties in managing parental expectations about the process, which could have an impact on the parent partnership (Hellawell, 2017).

The commitment of individual professionals around parental involvement is suggest to be a key aspect of success for the parent partnership (Sales & Vincent, 2018). Professionals in Hellawell's (2017) study stated that they were troubled by the intensified obligations of partnership working with parents and how to respond to their expectations; gaining a balance between supporting parents' hopes and aspirations for their child, while being honest about their child's needs. To achieve this balance, Hellawell (2017) suggests that professionals must "speak between the lines" with parents, which can exclude them from being partners in a transparent way. Hellawell (2017) states the parent-professional relationship could be further conserved by professionals working "behind the scenes" to debate and discuss the needs of the child. Although these suggestions could support some of the professionals' concerns, they could also go against the CoP principle of a family-centred process through reduced parental inclusion (Hellawell, 2017; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

2.7.10. Ability to advocate and non-compliance

Professionals in Sales and Vincent's (2018) study stated that the ability of parents to advocate on their child's behalf could affect their ability to be involved in the EHCP process. Concerns were raised that some parents did not have knowledge or confidence to effectively advocate for their child. Additional factors like time and financial means of a parent to challenge EHCP decisions were also stated as contributing towards an unbalanced system. These factors could potentially exclude some CYP, and their parents, from fully engaging in the EHCP process.

In addition to parents not being able to advocate for their child, some concerns were raised about parents that are unwilling to engage in a partnership or in the EHCP process (Curran et al., 2017). The idea of non-compliance, no matter what the reasons are behind it, are not addressed by the CoP. With no alternative guidance around non-compliance, this can leave some professionals feeling like they are co-opted into engineering compliance from parents;

questioning the empowerment of parents through the CoP, and suggesting the parent partnership only creates the change of compliant parent to compliant partner.

2.7.11. Literature search summary

This chapter has explored existing literature that answers the question: “what are parent and professional experiences of the CoP and EHCPs?” The literature search revealed 9 papers that were described, reviewed and critiqued using the literature review question as a guide. Findings from the literature highlight how the introduction of the CoP and EHCPs was mostly welcomed by professionals but some issues were raised around its implementation.

The CoP is suggested to provide general guidance that allows the SEND system to adapt to the specific needs of CYP, and their families, involved in the process. In contrast to these potential benefits, the general framework provided by the CoP has created some issues around implementation due to the lack of specific guidance. Support around the implementation of the CoP has mostly been provided through training by LAs, and informally through other SENCOs, but reports suggest this has not always been accessible or considered useful.

The introduction of the CoP is also reported to have generated several changes, including, changes in the SENCO role, redefining CYPs needs and EHCPs are more academically focused. Certain aspects of these changes have been valued, like the increased involvement of families in the process, but other changes have raised concerns. For example, issues were raised around practice and implementation of outcomes, multiagency working and parent partnerships.

Concerns have been raised about the language used in the CoP document, and its potential effect on parental expectations of the EHCP process. For example, the CoP can make parents feel like “private consumers”, who can make decisions about all aspects of their child’s education. Parental expectations are not always met, and can be challenging to manage, leaving parents confused by the process. The role of managing parental expectations of the EHCP

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process is often left to those working directly with parents, which can have a negative effect on the parent partnership. Finally, the review highlighted the potential need for parents to advocate for their child during the EHCP process, which currently provides no solutions for those unwilling or able to engage.

2.7.12. General points of critique from the literature review

In addition to the research specific criticisms raised above, there were six general points of critique that applied to the papers included in the literature review.

The first overall critique, revealed through the use of the CASP (2018), is that only one paper in the literature review involved parent participants. Parents are a central part of the CoP and the EHCP process and the absence of their voice raises questions about the transferability of the research.

The second overall critique was that most of the studies in this literature review did not address the researcher role within the research. For example, most of the papers did not address the relationship between the researcher and the participant, creating possible threats to validity like reactivity, respondent bias and researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, none of the studies mentioned how they followed up with the research participants or how they handled any effects during or after the study.

The third overall critique was revealed when using the CASP (2018) framework to review the literature. Most of the studies included in the literature review stated that they used a qualitative and inductive approach, but then used semi structured interviews with questions formed using the deductive method of using past research. An example of this involved using research on previous versions of the CoP to guide questions about the current CoP. This potentially introduces researcher bias into the studies through their assumptions and preconceptions, which could question its credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The fourth overall critique was the dominance and absence of certain professionals that have a consistent presence in the EHCP process. Most of the studies involved SENCos, but only three of the studies included other professionals involved in the EHCP process; two of these studies involved EPs, and only one study involved SEN caseworkers. This suggests some professionals were potentially underrepresented in this review and the absence of their voice raises questions about credibility and transferability through purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The fifth critique is the limitation of author variation in this literature review. Two of the authors in this literature search contributed two papers each, representing nearly half of the papers included in the final review list. This lack of author variation enhances concerns about trustworthiness raised in each of their studies above, and potentially in the current literature review as a whole (CASP, 2018).

The sixth and final critique is that most of the research included in this review were conducted shortly after the introduction of the CoP and EHCPs. The research findings included in this review seems to reflect this, with experiences of the CoP and EHCPs being described as a confusing process with many issues, that required frequent changes (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018). These concerns could reflect early policy implementation experiences of the participants as they learn, adapt and change to the new way of working. These concerns could reduce over time as the policy, and working practices, are embedded over the long-term. These factors could suggest findings from literature do not reflect the current context, which potentially limits our understanding of the CoP and EHCPs.

2.7.13. Conclusion

This review started by acknowledging the existing scoping literature review by Byrne (2013) about factors that could influence SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with SEN. Byrne's (2013) review highlighted the potentially complex and diverse range of factors parents

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can take into considerations during the SEP decision-making process. Factors influencing decision-making provide insights into the process, but are often generated by extracting them from an overall experience, removing the potentially informative context in which decisions are made.

To further explore our understanding through existing literature, this study conducted a literature search to explore the views and experiences of parents and professionals about the new CoP and EHCPs. The literature search generated a wide range of experiences, mostly from professionals, that expressed concern and inconsistencies when implementing the CoP changes. This could be due to the lack of guidance that the CoP provides around implementing the legislative changes, leaving professionals to create their own ways of working. The literature search also revealed a lack of parent voice in the research on experiences of the CoP and EHCPs.

Based on these findings from the literature, an open approach to investigating parental experience of SEP decision-making was taken in this research. This would allow parents of CYP with an EHCP to provide a detailed account of their experiences, adding context and their voice, to our collective understanding of SEP decision-making in the literature.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the aims and purpose of this research and how that influenced the considerations and selection of methodology. The goal of the chosen methodology was to answer the research question “What narratives do parents of children with an EHCP provide when asked about their experience of SEP decision-making?”. This chapter starts by outlining the chosen methodology and the reasons for its selection. Next, the foundational concepts of social inquiry will be considered and how they apply within this research, including ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. Next, further details of the chosen method of

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narrative inquiry are provided, with an outline of the data gathering strategy and its application through an initial study. This chapter concludes with some ethical considerations about this research.

3.2. Chosen method

The current study chose to use a narrative research approach to data collection and analysis. Exploration of the current literature suggests this is an unexplored way of researching parental decision-making of SEP. Existing literature mostly focuses on listing the different “factors” that influenced the parental decision-making process, which aims to explain “how” parents make certain decisions (Byrne, 2013). Although these factors are important, they are often considered in isolation and exclude aspects of context, which could suggest they explain more of the “why” than the “how” of decision-making. By adopting a narrative approach, this research aims to not only reveal the factors that influenced parental decision-making, but to also reveal greater levels of detail about the context within which these decisions were made; potentially revealing the “how” and the “why” of SEP decision-making.

3.3. Foundational concepts in social enquiry

All research is based on some underlying principles that shape its construction and process. Blaikie (2009) states the four key foundational concepts that the researcher must engage with during social enquiry are ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. Each of these foundational concepts will now be described and then the underlying principles selected for this research will be highlighted and justified.

3.3.1. Ontology.

Ontology refers to assumptions made by the researcher about the nature of social reality (Blaikie, 2009). There are a range of different ontological positions that a researcher can take. Two extreme versions of ontology include a realist paradigm and a relativist paradigm.

Generally speaking, a realist paradigm makes the assumption that there is an objective reality that is independent from the human mind (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2011). This objective reality can be observed and measured through research to verify the existence of something. Realist research typically uses the scientific principles of testing hypotheses through data collection, usually in the form of numbers, with the aim of systematising knowledge through generalisable principles (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007). Key features of realist research include; research is a deductive process; focusing on what can be measured; participant numbers and measures used are fixed from the start; hypotheses are formulated and tested through the research.

A broad definition of the relativist paradigm suggests there is no external reality independent of the human mind, there are only different sets of classifications and meaning that individuals' attach to the world (Robson & McCartan, 2016). There is no single "truth" in a relativist paradigm, with reality being constructed through different people, groups and cultures. Research underpinned by a relativist perspective is also known as qualitative. Key features of the relativist research include; an inductive process; a focus on what can be made meaningful; use of techniques like observations and interviews to collect data; use of a flexible and less prescriptive process in terms of participant numbers; increased length of involvement.

3.3.2. Epistemology.

Epistemology is the claims and assumptions the researcher makes around the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality (Blaikie, 2009). There are many different forms of epistemology, with each providing a philosophical grounding about the forms of knowledge that are possible (Crotty, 1998). For example, objectivist epistemology suggests that reality exists independently from consciousness. People have contact with reality through the senses, such as perception (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast, constructivist epistemology suggests that there is no objective truth, but instead knowledge and meaning is constructed

through an interaction between consciousness and the realities in our world (Crotty, 1998). As a result, different people may construct different meanings about the same phenomenon.

The form of epistemology chosen by the researcher will inform the theoretical perspective of the research, providing a philosophical stance and set of associated assumptions that inform the methodology. A theoretical perspective aims to detail these assumptions and provide some context for the research process (Crotty, 1998). An example of a theoretical perspective is positivism, which is a deterministic philosophy that looks to assess causes and their effect on outcomes, informed by an objectivist epistemology (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast, the theoretical perspective of interpretivism suggests meaning is constructed through culture and history of the social world, with links to constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998).

3.3.3. Ontology and epistemology for this research.

Ontology and epistemology are interconnected through the assumptions and beliefs they bring to research. The links between each ontological and epistemological perspective can be further linked to a theoretical perspective. The current research looks to explore the experiences of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. The focus on parental experiences could suggest a societal focus to the research question, potentially making a scientific approach inappropriate. For example, the literature search suggested a broad range of potential influences on the parental decision-making process, including legislation, political situation, geographic location, type and severity of SEN, funding, sources of support and previous experiences of school (Byrne, 2013). Based on the assumptions of realist ontology and objectivist epistemology, this would suggest that there was one ideal school for each child that could be chosen using the influencing criteria. The reality is that existing research has highlighted only some of the potentially influential factors on the decision-making process. These factors not only varied within, but between each other, and were influenced by other

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aspects like the specific parent, their location, the child and their level of need. This level of complexity suggests that multiple and interrelated factors need to be considered when making decisions about SEP. In addition, a realist ontology and objectivist epistemology would require this research to select and focus on certain aspects of the parental decision-making process and look for causal factors on outcomes. Although this approach could highlight certain factors affecting the decision-making experience, the level of control needed for this type of research could also limit any potential findings, with the possibility of creating misleading causal factors. For example, this approach could lack ecological validity by missing other potential contributing factors, miss cultural factors affecting the process and not consider the ethical aspects influencing parental decision-making (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009).

Based on these concerns, this view of a single objective reality was rejected by the current research. As an alternative, a societal perspective of social reality and ways of gaining knowledge was favoured. The approach taken for this research is a relativist ontology with a social constructivist epistemology. A relativist ontology suggests there is no single “truth” to parental decision-making, but instead values their own perception of experiences, events and their journey to construct meaning. A relativist perspective allowed the current research to take an inductive perspective to how parents understand and construct their role within their decision-making experience, while acknowledging the role of the researcher and the parents in the current research through a reflexive process (Parcell & Baker, 2017).

The social constructivist epistemology that informs this research takes the view that individuals have prior knowledge and experiences, determined by social and cultural factors, that are selected and transformed to construct knowledge out of experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Social constructivist epistemology assumes that an individual’s learning first takes place at the social level, which is then developed further on an individual level. This allows the individual to go beyond the information provided socially, to construct their own

meaning and provide organisation to experience. This approach allows the current research to focus on how parents, as individuals, develop their own subjective meanings of the SEP decision-making experience through their stories and discourses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.3.4. Methodology.

Blaikie (2009) suggests the terms method and methodology are often used interchangeably, which is unfortunate and undesirable. Methods are the techniques applied to collect and analyse data. Methodology refers to how research is done, the critical analysis of research methods and how theories are generated and tested. Using this terminology, this section will mostly focus on methodology. The research method will be briefly discussed here, with further details included in the next section of this chapter.

Selection of methodology is primarily driven by the research question and how best to collect related data. The current study looked to explore parental experiences of SEP decision-making for CYP with an EHCP. As this research does not aim to systematise knowledge or generalise findings, a quantitative or mixed methods approach was not selected. Qualitative research looks to understand a phenomenon, rather than control or predict it, as intended in the current research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Qualitative research methodology provided the freedom and flexibility to capture parental experiences and ways to analyse the resulting data.

This research also considered how data would be collected and if the selected method could limit our objective understanding of the parental decision-making experience of SEP. A range of different methodologies within the qualitative paradigm were considered for this research. Three methodologies that were considered for this research included grounded theory, case studies and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). These methodologies will now be briefly described and their suitability for the current research will be discussed.

Grounded theory is a multistage and incremental method that aims to develop new theoretical perspectives based on what individuals' do and say in relation to particular

experiences (Yin, 2018). Case studies use theory to guide data collection from multiple sources and perform in-depth analysis of a phenomenon (e.g. activity, process or an individual) within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). IPA looks to explore individual perceptions and the meaning they give to a phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

All three of the suggested methodologies above include qualities suitable for the current research, such as providing space for in-depth and rich information about parental experiences and the ability to combine the phenomenon of parental decision-making of SEP for CYP with an EHCP in a real-world context. Despite these strengths, all these methodologies required the breaking-up of these accounts into different parts (e.g. themes, theories) rather than consider the “journey” of parental experience as a whole and did not provide the depth of information desired for the current research.

An alternative methodology that addressed these needs is narrative research. Narratives are described as a primary source of human knowing, providing access to human thoughts, concerns, actions and values (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Psycho-narratology is an emerging form of inquiry that values stories as potential sources of psychological discovery (Hiles, Cermak, & Chrz, 2009). Narratives provide psychology with an opportunity to not only explore stimulus driven event-causality aspects of human life, but also include aspects of the mind through agent-causality (Hiles et al., 2017).

Stories are told as a way of communicating a range of thoughts, feelings and ideas; while achieving a wide range of potential aims like making a point, fulfil social demands, highlight what is expected and challenge social norms. During the process of telling stories, and how they are told, the teller is suggested to create and reveal a sense of their own identity (Hiles et al., 2017). Through the tellers retelling of a story, they actively engage in how they construct the experience through their own personal meaning-making.

Narrative research shares many qualities with the alternative methodologies considered above, but it also allows for in-depth analysis of stories as a whole narrative. Based on these combined qualities, and in relation to the focus of this research, the methodology of narrative research was selected.

3.4. Narrative research - Method

3.4.1. Data collection.

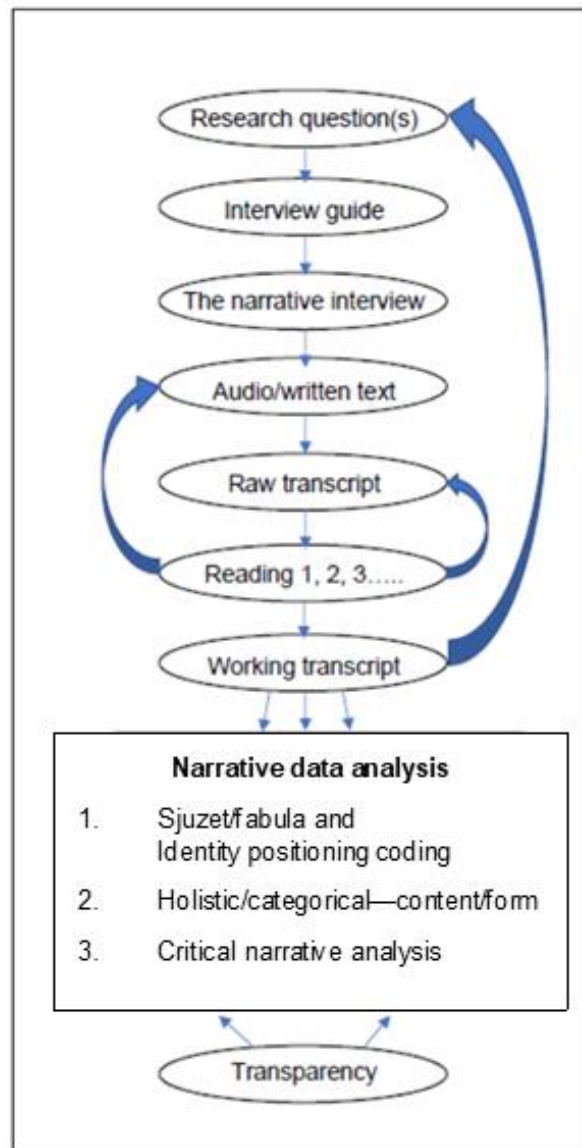
The aim of this research was to gain some insight into the parental experiences of SEP decision-making. To achieve this aim, a range of data collecting methods were considered, which will now be discussed.

Narrative can be described as a form of story-telling, which is suggested to mostly follow universal rules that guide the story production process known as the story schema. Story-telling within research starts by using a particular cue, like being given information informed by a research question. Once the participant starts to talk, the storytelling continues as a flowing narration that follows underlying tacit rules (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The story schema is suggested to be self-generating and has the three main characteristics of detailed texture, relevance fixation and closing of the gestalt. Detailed texture involves the participant providing a level of detail that provides a plausible account of a story, while considering the needs of the listener. Relevance fixations are the points of the story the participant selects and finds especially relevant from their perspective to include in the story. Closing of the gestalt refers to the need to complete a core event of a story which allows it to flow. The core event is told to completion by including a beginning, a middle and an end.

The method of data collection used for this research needed to ensure these aspects of story-telling were supported and captured. The importance of the story-teller's account for this research indicated the use of an open question and flowing format for the interview. This would allow participants the space to share their stories, while reducing the role and influence of the

interviewer. To achieve these goals, the data collection method of narrative interview (NI) was selected. Figure 2 highlights where NI fits into the narrative analysis process used in this research.

3.4.2. Figure 2. *Adapted NOI model of analysis*



NI is a qualitative method of conducting unstructured and in-depth interviews. The NI technique used within this study was originally developed by Schutze (1977) in an unpublished manuscript and cited by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000). NI aims to move away from the traditional question-answer structure of interviews and allows storytelling schema to take its

place. NI promotes participants (known as “informants” in NI) to engage in storytelling and aims to reduce the influence of the interviewer as much as possible. By encouraging the interviewer to mostly listen, it promotes the unbroken accounts from informants, guided by the storytelling schema. NI also limits the pre-structuring of the interview as much as possible and allows the informant to use their own language and the storytelling schema to guide the interview. Through the reduction of interviewer influence, NI accommodates for a wide range of informants to tell their story, in their words, from their perspective. By respecting and appreciating these differences in perspective, NI promotes a more “valid” account of the informant experiences and worldview. A detailed description of the NI method of data collection used in the current research is outlined later in this chapter.

3.4.3. Critique of Narrative interviewing and response in this research.

The research literature has raised several criticisms of the NI method of data collection and of narrative interviewing in general. The two main criticisms made about NI in the literature are the uncontrollable expectations of the interview and the unrealistic role and rule requirements of its procedures.

The interviewer is expected to pose themselves as not knowing anything about the subject they are asking the informant about. It is unlikely that the informant thinks the researcher does not know anything about the subject, which could affect the content of their stories, like leaving certain information out or saying what they think the researcher wants to hear. The current research looked to address these concerns by initially building rapport and explicitly outlining the method and intentions of the research before the interview. It is hoped this will allow the parent to feel comfortable providing their own account of their experiences, unaffected by their perceived expectations of the researcher.

The unrealistic role and rule requirements of NI are another criticism made about the method. Witzel (1982, as cited in Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) raised concerns that the

initial topic introduction might not be suitable for all informants. This research tried to address this concern by using a standardised structure to the initial topic introduction, using general terms that focused on the research questions, combined with key points from existing literature (appendix C). Informants were asked if the introduction made sense to them and if they had any questions before the start of the interview. This approach aimed to increase the suitability of the introduction by adapting it based on the needs of each informant.

The NI rules have also been criticised for blurring the boundaries between narrative and semi-structured interviews. Hermanns (1991, as cited in Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) states that NI is not a new form of interview, but is actually a semi-structured interview, enhanced by narratives. These concerns are addressed in the current research in two key ways. By using each informant's own language to create open questions, it aims to explore the informants' account, while allowing them to influence the process. The second measure implemented in this research was to analyse the data using the temporal flow structure informants provided during their continuous interview account of their SEP decision-making experiences. Informant responses to questions were integrated into the original story structure during the analysis. The aim of this approach was to reduce the effects additional questions could have on an informant's narrative account, while utilising the rich information they provided in response to questions.

3.4.4. Narrative analysis.

Once the data was collected, a form of narrative analysis (NA) was applied. NA involves the interpretation of stories told within the context of research. NA can involve exploring different elements of a narrative, like how they are told, how they are performed, what functions they perform and their substance (Parcell & Baker, 2017). These elements can be analysed independently, or in combination, to make diverse interpretations and conclusions.

There are many different models of NA and a range of them were considered for the current research. A brief overview of two models considered for this research will now be outlined.

The Listening Guide (TLG) is a method of NA that facilitates psychological inquiry. TLG is a whole approach to narrative research that focuses on voice and the interplay of voices within an interview, transcript, or text data (Gilligan, 2015). Another form of NA considered for this research was created by Schütze (1977;1983, as cited in Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). This form of NA uses a six-stage process to analyse narrative data, usually in the form of interviews.

The two models raised above provide forms of NA that could have been applied to the interview data collected for this research. Both models allowed the researcher to view each parental narrative as a whole, while facilitating in-depth analysis of the data. Despite these positive qualities, neither methods were considered suitable for the current research. TLG focuses the analysis on the voices and relationships, which requires additional individuals to be involved in the interview. The voices and relationships between parents were considered as an area of focus, but some participants may be single parents, or both parents may not have been available for the research interview. The voice of the interviewer was considered, but this research wanted to reduce their involvement and promote the parent voice. Consideration of these factors meant TLG was not used as the method of NA in the current research.

Schütze's (1977;1983, as cited in Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) method of NA was also not selected for this research. This method looks to create operative theories out of the usual and unusual aspects of a narrative. The relatively new nature of EHCPs, combined with the flexible and general guidelines from the CoP, could suggest that "usual" practice has not yet been established. This is further complicated by the variations in practice based on professional preferences, geographic location and the nature of a child's specific needs. In

addition, this model involves the comparison of individual experiences to create collective trajectories. This potentially hints at the creation of generalisable findings from the data, which is at odds with the epistemological position taken in this research.

3.4.5. Narrative oriented inquiry.

Narrative Oriented Inquiry (NOI) is an alternative method of NA, offering a dynamic framework for the analysis of human narratives. NOI looks to understand the landscape of human concerns by exploring how individuals' actively construct their reality and identity (Hiles et al., 2009). NOI is an exploratory form of analysis, which is data driven, and is not concerned with making predictions.

NOI emphasises the relationship between the told, the retelling and the teller (figure 1). The told is in the foreground and is influenced in the background by the multiple ways of retelling a story. Both the told and the retelling are influenced in the background by the teller; who positions themselves, and reveals aspects of their identity, through the selection of the told from the different ways of retelling a story. NOI considers all narratives are constrained by the teller's perceived social role and their positioning within context when telling a story. The current research involved the teller as parents of children with an EHCP, retelling their story to the researcher, who is also a trainee educational psychologist (TEP). How the teller perceived themselves, and how they perceived the researcher, is internally driven. These contextual influences can affect the teller's "self-positioning" and identity formation, which is reflected through their retelling of a story (Hiles et al., 2017).

The idea of identity positioning is a central part of the NOI approach. Identity positioning "is concerned primarily with how the person is perceiving, relating to, and revealing their experience of self" (Hiles et al., 2017, p159). Identity positions also overlap with the idea of positioning theory; exploring how people use language through discourse to locate themselves and others in a social world, while claiming certain rights and assigning

duties on others (Harré, 2012; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010). Rights and duties can be based on tacit beliefs of unchallenged actions or as explicitly formulated rules and conventions (Harré, 2012). Tacit beliefs are a form of knowledge that are not taught, but are gained through experience (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). “Positioning Theory is based on the principle that not everyone involved in a social episode has equal access to rights and duties to perform particular kinds of meaningful actions at that moment and with those people” (Harré, 2012, p193). As a result, positioning has moral implications like assigning a person or a group as, being trusted or distrusted, with-us or against-us (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010).

NOI also adopts the concept of abductive thinking, which is described as a quick and intuitive form of reasoning (Hiles et al., 2009). Abductive reasoning allows the storyteller to quickly adapt to the context in which the story is told and express their experiences through narratives. Abductive reasoning also provides the storyteller with easy access to tacit knowledge and explain their experience through narrative. Tacit knowledge is difficult to make explicit, but inductive inferences in the background of a story, can help reveal its potential influence (Hiles et al., 2017).

Abductive thinking is best illustrated through the retelling of stories, which provides the opportunity for narrative reframing and to tell stories in different ways. This provides the teller with opportunities to develop and change their understanding of an experience. Examples of these changes can include shifting the story’s emphasis or meeting the contextual demands of the audience. These potential aspects of retelling stories allow the teller to change their interpretation and how they make sense of the experience, which in turn can influence its effect on their identity-positioning. The retelling of stories allows an individual to engage in an ongoing and continual process of change that can facilitate a renegotiation of their sense of self (Hiles et al., 2017).

Identity positioning, abductive thinking and narrative reframing are suggested to be the core concepts that allow the exploration of narrative intelligence; the human ability to organise and understand experiences into narratives (Mateas & Sengers, 1998). Narrative intelligence includes the ability to listen to, receive, understand and produce narratives.

3.5. Participants

This research aimed to recruit participants who had a deep understanding of SEP decision-making for CYP with an EHCP. The object of focus when recruiting participants into the current qualitative research were the events, incidents, and experiences, rather than the people per se (Sandelowski, 1995). These specific participant requirements limited the use of probability sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to gain participants with experience of this phenomenon. Purposeful sampling has been criticised for lacking transferability, dependability and its openness to researcher bias. As this study is only looking to explore individual parental experiences, transferability claims are not being made. Concerns about dependability will be addressed in the method section below. The issue of researcher bias was limited by; using voluntary participation in the study; creating only two inclusion criteria; by indirectly recruiting through colleagues and SENCOs; all parents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria, and showed an interest in the study, were contacted directly by the researcher and offered the chance to participate.

The recruitment of participants was initially conducted by contacting colleagues at the LA service where the researcher worked. EPs and specialist teachers were asked if they could help, by contacting SENCOs they worked with, to recruit parents into the research. A brief written outline of the research with participant criteria was created to be shared with SENCOs (appendix D). This information was also shared at a SENCO forum. SENCOs were asked to approach parents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria to gain their consent for the researcher to contact them and discuss participation in the research.

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The selection criteria for recruiting participants into this research were parents of CYP with an EHCP, who had recently gone through the process of selecting a SEP. The criteria chosen provided the minimum amount of direction needed to ensure participants could contribute information about the specific phenomena focused on in this research. Having only two criteria also allowed the broader range of potential parents to engage and contribute to the research.

The recruitment strategy, combined with the selection criteria, generated five parents who gave their permission to be contacted by the researcher. All parents in this study were recruited through the SENCo at their CYPs school. Literature on the NOI method does not provide any specific numbers of participants required for research. Guidance around NA methods suggests that small research samples are often used as this allows for deep analysis of rich data (Sandelowski, 1995).

Once parents had given their permission, the researcher contacted them by phone or by email. The researcher either sent the participants an invitation letter, or used the content of the letter, to verbally discuss the research over the phone (appendix E). Once the research was explained, the parents were asked if they would like to participate in the research. Out of the five participants who showed an interest in the research, four agreed and proceeded to interview. The fifth parent initially agreed to participate in the research, but later withdrew from the study due to family reasons. In line with the inclusion criteria, all four parents interviewed for this research had at least one child with an EHCP, who were at the end of Year six or at the beginning of year seven, and had recently gone through the SEP decision-making process.

As part of this research, participants completed a demographic form (appendix I). Participant responses highlighted that three participants were female and three were male, all identified as English, were within the age range of 25-74 years, held a range of qualifications

from GCSEs to postgraduate degree, had a range of employment statuses, all were either married or in a domestic partnership and all had between 2-3 children in their household.

3.6. Strategies for data gathering - Interview schedule

The NI technique prescribes four phases and a set of rules. Table 2 highlights the basic phases and associated rules for NI. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) do state that these rules are a standard set of aspirations and compromises might have to be made given the context of the interview and the informant. This research made some slight adjustments to suggested phases of NI, which are discussed in the relevant sections below.

3.6.1. Table 2. *Basic phases of the narrative interview*

Phases	Rules
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the field • Formulating exmanent questions
1. Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulating initial topic for narration
2. Main narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interruptions • Only non-verbal encouragement to continue story-telling • Wait for the Coda
3. Questioning phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only “what happened then?” • No opinion and attitude questions • No arguing or contradictions • No why questions • Exmanent into immanent questions
4. Concluding talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop recording • Why questions allowed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory protocol immediately after interview
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3.6.2. Preparation.

A range of tasks were completed by the researcher in preparation for the interview. First, the researcher familiarised themselves with the literature on SEP decision-making by parents of children with SEN. The knowledge and understanding gained from literature informed the researcher's understanding of the key issues in this area of research, known in NI as exmanent issues. These issues, along with the researcher's areas of interest, inform the generation of exmanent questions. These exmanent issues and questions were written down onto a sheet and taken into the interview as guidance if needed (appendix C).

3.6.3. Phase 1: initiation.

The initiation phase involved the researcher providing an outline of the research and the NI technique to the informant. The researcher created a list of key points and phrases for the introduction and wrote them down on the prompt sheet (appendix C). The prompt sheet ensured all essential information was provided to each of the informants, while aiming to reduce variation in presentation by using a standardised format.

3.6.4. Phase 2 – Main narration.

At the start of the narration, the interviewer turned the audio recorder on to capture the interview. During the main narration, the interviewer listened, used some non-verbal signals and occasionally made notes. When an informant initially indicated they had run out of things to say, the interviewer prompted them by using the phrase "Is there anything else you would like to say?" This continued until the informant had nothing else to add and their story came to a natural end.

3.6.5. Phase 3 – questioning phase.

During this phase, the interviewer used notes made about immanent issues raised during the interview to guide the creation of questions. Immanent issues are generated directly by the informant through their use of language and the content of their storytelling. The role of the interviewer is to use immanent issues, and the language used by the informant, to explore exmanent issues. The interviewer achieved this by attentively listening to the informant during the interview, and taking notes using the language of the informant. These notes were then used to create questions, which usually took the form of asking the informant to talk more about an immanent issue they raised. Example questions included “could you tell me more about” and “what happened before/after/then”. An example of the note taken by the researcher in one of the interviews, and the questions they generated, can be seen in appendix F.

3.6.6. Phase 4 – concluding talk.

Once the interview was over and the audio recording had been stopped, all participants continued to talk with the researcher. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) suggest that interesting discussions can develop at this time. The researcher had ethical concerns about the transparency of this part of the NI approach as it was not mentioned at any time to the informant. The researcher was concerned about this and its potential effect on the researcher-informant relationship. The decision was made to not take any notes after the recording stopped and no information from conversations after the interview were included in the analysis.

3.7. Initial interview

Using the established NI structure raised above, an initial study was conducted, to test and review the chosen interview approach. The pilot study revealed that the initiation stage was sufficient to generate a continuous narration without prompts for a period of 40 minutes. The initial general prompting questions enabled the informants to continue their narrative beyond their initial end point. Once the parents had exhausted their thoughts after initial prompts, the

researcher was able to use the immanent notes, combined with the exmanent themes from the research, to generate questions using the informant's language and extend their narrative. The interview method used during the initial study generated rich and detailed data about the parent's decision-making experience. Based on the success of the initial study, the researcher made no adaptations to the interview method for subsequent interviews.

3.8. Ethical considerations

As part of this research project, ethical approval was gained from the university and the LA (appendix G). This research considered the ethical aspects of anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, right to withdraw and a duty of care towards the participants. These aspects were outlined in the invitation letter given to participants before conducting the research (appendix E). The researcher initially discussed the ethical aspects of the research over the phone during the initial recruitment phase. The researcher gave the participants a physical copy of the invitation letter immediately before the interview, and responded to any questions about the research. Once participants were happy to proceed, they were asked to sign a consent form (appendix H).

The inclusion criteria for this research was kept deliberately short to allow a broad range of parents to participate, although the limitations of the opt-in recruitment strategy reduced the potential of including hard to reach groups. No aspects of deception were used in this research and participants were not paid for their involvement.

A debriefing letter was presented to participants at the end of the research, and a further opportunity to ask questions about the research was provided (appendix M). The researcher was mindful that the topic of this research might have raised some difficult experiences for parents and had prepared to offer support and signposting to services in the event of any concerns raised during the interviews. These were not required by any participants within this

study at the time of interview or during the member checking follow-up call. Support for the researcher in relation to the interview experiences was provided by their supervisor.

4. Analysis and findings

4.1. Chapter overview

The process of analysing the data from all four interviews is described in this chapter with the aim of increasing methodological transparency (Hiles et al., 2017). Within the NOI method, the process of analysis starts at the point of transcription, which is described first. This chapter then moves onto explaining the different analytic strategies used in this research and outlines the process for each. The final section describes the findings generated through analysis.

4.1.1. Introduction.

It should be noted, in line with other narrative approaches, the analysis presented in this chapter should be considered as an explicitly abductive interpretation of the data from the perspective of the researcher (Hiles et al., 2017). Each interview is unique to each teller, located in the specific time and place of the telling and in the context of being told to the researcher for this specific research project. The analysis presented is based on using the NOI method to generate a set of observations that were interpreted by the researcher using the simplest and most likely explanation to them (figure 2). This means the analysis presented here is just one perspective on these parents' narratives and should not be considered as definitive.

This research tried to apply a level of consistency to the approach of analysis where possible. For example, all interviews were conducted using the same narrative interview method. Questions posed during the interviews did vary, but the researcher mostly used a technique of asking open questions to explore additional information about a certain area raised by the informant (e.g. "can you tell me more about", "talk to me a little more about").

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Once the interviews were complete, the formal part of analysis was conducted. Each interview was analysed individually and in sequence of their collection. The aim of this was to respect the individuality of each informant, and reduce the potential influence of the interviews on each other during the analysis. Although it should be noted that earlier interviews may have influenced the analysis of subsequent interviews.

As suggested by Hiles et al (2017), the analysis will benefit from revisiting the research question:

“what narratives do parents of children with an EHCP provide when asked about their experience of the decision-making process of SEP?”

Keeping the research question in mind, it is important to note that this study was open to the specific parental responses provided through their narratives, which is central to the NOI approach. Parents in this study often spoke about their experiences surrounding SEP decision-making, rather than the decision itself. This will be explored in more detail in the discussion and mentioned here for reader clarity.

4.1.2. Interview transcription.

Recorded interviews ranged from 1 hour and 45 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes in duration. These recordings included the main uninterrupted narrative and informant responses to questions. The audio recordings were then transcribed, which based on the NOI model, is part of the analysis process (figure 2). Data in the form of audio recording were transcribed verbatim by the researcher themselves into a Word document; with the aim of increasing the researcher’s familiarity and immersion in the data, and begin the dynamic and abductive process of analysing the narratives (Hiles et al., 2017). The decision was made not to transcribe paralinguistic aspects of the interview (e.g. pauses, hesitations) as the researcher deemed these open to over-interpretation (Frosh & Emerson, 2005).

4.1.3. Working transcript.

After transcribing the audio files, the process of analysis continued by the researcher rereading the raw transcript and relistening to the audio interview recordings. During the initial readings, the researcher divided the transcribed interview text into segments based on the natural breaks or “episodes” in the storytelling to create a working transcript (Hiles et al., 2009).

During the development of the working transcript, the researcher considered how to work with the interviews that involved two parents. The transcription process involved identifying each parent’s contribution to the narrative, but the decision was made to analyse the interviews with two parents as one narrative. This decision was made as the current research did not aim to focus on within parent differences, which could have been revealed through analysing each parent’s narrative separately, and was considered outside the scope of this research. Support for this decision was revealed through initial readings, with the two interviews involving both parents mostly complemented each other’s narrative account. Based on these reasons, and reflected in the findings, the transcripts were mostly analysed as a single narrative in the current research.

4.1.4. Sjuzet-fabula and identity positioning coding analysis.

Once a working transcript had been created, the next stage of NOI analysis involved identifying two interrelated components of the sjuzet and the fabula in the text. NOI suggests this form of analysis is an essential starting point and provides a gateway to further understanding of the data through later stages of analysis (Hiles et al., 2017).

The sjuzet is known as the unbounded part of the story and reflects the way the story is told. Examples of the sjuzet can involve metaphors and exaggerations that can reflect how the informant makes sense of the story, what meaning it has for them and how they position themselves within the narrative. Hiles et al (2009) suggest the sjuzet is essential to

understanding the psychological processes involved in personal narratives. The *sjuzet* is coded in the transcript by underlining related words, phases, sentences and paragraphs.

The *fabula* is the bounded part of the story and reflects the basic outline of events as they occurred (Hiles et al., 2017). The *fabula* defines the outline of the story and any changes would present a different story. The *fabula* is usually indicated in the transcript through the division of narrative into episodes. A clear division of the *fabula* episodes was not always possible in the text due the unique nature of each informant's retelling. For example, some *fabula* episodes overlapped or intertwined in the retelling. The additional aspect of interaction between parents in the narrative also affected the creation of clear *fabula* episodes.

The *sjuzet* and the *fabula* can also functionally overlap, which can provide insightful aspects of the retelling. When the *sjuzet* and *fabula* overlapped, this was indicated by highlighting that part of the transcript (see appendix J for an example).

The role and function of the *sjuzet* and *fabula* during narrative analysis can vary in its application. For this research project, the *sjuzet* and the *fabula* in each transcript were seen as a platform to guide and inform later stages of the analysis. Using the *sjuzet* and *fabula* as a starting point allowed the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data in a systematic way and create notes around initial impressions and identity positions. These notes were added to the right-hand column of the annotated transcript (appendix J). After completing the transcription, the notes were then transferred to a separate document, creating a list to guide the main forms of analysis used in this research.

4.1.5. Holistic/categorical-content/form analysis.

The researcher's initial aim, and a key reason for adopting the NOI approach, was to analyse each individual informant's narrative as a whole. To achieve this aim, three analytic strategies proposed by Lieblich et al (1998) were used in this research.

1. Holistic-content analysis was used in all four interviews and involved linking specific content to the whole story. There are no clear directions for this stage of the analysis. The researcher reread the transcripts and initial notes with an open mind until a pattern emerged from the text. The researcher then used this pattern to form a focus of the entire retelling. The researcher then reread the initial notes and marked text that related specifically to the foci. Once this was established, the researcher related the initial notes and highlighted relevant text from the transcript (see appendix J, K and L for examples of the different stages of analysis).
2. Holistic-form focuses on the plot that threads through the whole story and provides its form. By analysing the structure of the retelling, it is hoped to reveal aspects of the teller's personal construction of their life experiences; revealing areas such as the teller's identity, perceptions and values. The researcher aimed to use the structure of the uninterrupted narrative to conduct the holistic-form analysis (see appendix J, K and L). The researcher conducted holistic-form analysis by using the temporal order of their retelling when rereading the text, relistening to the audio and reviewing initial notes. The unstructured and messy nature of the storytelling made this challenging. An aspect of restorying was required at times, especially when incorporating responses to questions later in the narrative, but the original temporal order was used as the guiding framework for this process.
3. Categorical-form involves close analysis of the *sjuzet* to reveal formal aspects of the narrative. The purpose of this strategy is to learn something about the teller beyond focusing on the content of a narrative retelling. Categorical form analysis feeds into the critical narrative analysis used in this research, which is outlined below. The areas of foci provided by the holistic-content and holistic-form analysis, combined with the initial identity positioning notes, helped the researcher to identify the areas of the

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narrative interview to apply categorical-form analysis. The researcher reviewed the sjuzet contained in these sections of the transcript, and used critical narrative analysis, to generate categorical-form based findings for each of the interviews (see appendix J, K and L). Further details of this process are provided in critical narrative analysis section below.

4.1.6. Critical narrative analysis.

Critical narrative analysis looks to use critical aspects of discourse analysis, and combine these with a person's active construction of meaning and identity positions, to create a narrative identity (Hiles et al., 2017). This approach is an extension of Emerson and Frosh's (2004) original approach to explore the idea of a narrative identity, which looks to explore why a story is told in a certain way, how the teller positions themselves and how the teller's sense of self is affected by the context.

As outlined in the methodology section, identity positioning is a key focus of NOI, involving the teller positioning themselves towards the told through their unique way of retelling a story (figure 1). The teller actively constructs a number of identity positions, which when combined, form a narrative identity (Hiles et al., 2009). To explore this idea further, this research analysed how each of the tellers constructed their own identity in relation to the socio-cultural practices around them.

This research used initial notes and categorical-form analysis to reveal the emerging identity positions from the text. These positions were reviewed and further condensed into recurring identity positions. These refined identity positions were kept in mind while rereading and relistening to the interviews to identify an overarching narrative identity from telling. The selected narrative identity for each interview was then used to identify and highlight aspects of the text during a subsequent rereading (appendix J).

4.2. Findings introduction

This section will provide a description of the findings generated by the interview analysis conducted for this research. In line with the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches taken in this research, each interview is analysed and discussed individually.

A brief description of the parents and their current situation will be provided before the analysis to give some context for the reader. All contextual information was provided by the informants as an unprompted part of the interview and reflected the contextual aspects they considered to be important. The researcher made the conscious decision to not ask any contextual questions before the interview due to the potential impact this could have on the research. Asking for specific contextual information could have potentially influenced the informant's perception of the research and their narrative retelling, and the researcher's perception of the parents during the stages of interview and analysis. Some contextual details were provided by parents during the interview, and were heard by the researcher, which may have had an unconscious influence on the research process.

The researcher removed all identifying information from the transcripts (e.g. names, dates, locations). For the benefit of reading, names have been added to the findings section but all names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Quotes from the original transcript that are included below will be indented, in italics and identified by a number that translates back to the specific episode in the transcript.

The analysis below aimed to use the structure of the original unbroken narrative before questioning. The aim of this was to respect the original narrative as a whole and promote temporal flow (Hiles et al., 2017). Despite this aim, the nature of the interviews meant informants often recalled their experiences as they came to mind. This meant some aspects of

restorying were required for the analytic process, and for the benefit of the reader. The researcher was conscious of keeping restorying to a minimum and used the unbroken narrative as a guide when conducting this process.

Each interview analysis will end with a summary of findings, but not a conclusion, as this was viewed by the researcher as being too deductive; going against the social constructivist nature of this research. The analysis and findings from each interview are left for the reader to absorb and reflect on.

4.3. Mr and Mrs Jack interview findings

4.3.1. Background and context.

This interview was conducted with Mr and Mrs Jack, who live with their two sons. Mr and Mrs Jack talked about their son Bob in their narrative. Bob attends a mainstream secondary school, has an EHCP and is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Mr and Mrs Jack had moved to the area from a city in the UK.

4.3.2. Marketisation of education.

Throughout the narrative, Mr and Mrs Jack use certain phrases associated with the marketisation of education, including, “*buy in*”, “*customer*”, “*sell*”, “*sold*”, “*cost*”, “*finance*”, “*funding*” and “*money*”. Mr and Mrs Jack first use this language in relation to the SENCo at their chosen SEP:

3. “*...she’d already sold it and we are yet to really find out whether she’s just a brilliant salesperson or if she’s actually...*”

This quote seems to highlight the role of the SENCo as a salesperson, who sells the school and its ability to provide for their child’s needs. Mr and Mrs Jack also seem to associate the SENCo with a cultural interpretation of salespeople, who can be economic with the truth;

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promoting the best qualities of a service before purchase, and withholding some of the less desirable features.

Despite this association with marketisation, Mr and Mrs Jack also highlight how the relationship with schools is different to those within business:

5. *“The way I feel we chose is down to a level of professionalism, they don’t want anything from you, but you want something from them”*

Professionalism is used as a term that heavily influenced their decision-making around SEP. The use of the word professionalism could potentially be translated as a diplomatic way of saying if a mainstream school is inclusive and provides for any additional needs’ a child might have. The parents go onto later clarify the language they used associated with marketisation:

39. *“Selling is not the right word, but it's really trying to gauge how passionate they are about it”*

Mr and Mrs Jack seem to use the word “passionate”, in a similar way to their use of the word “professionalism”, as a way to referring to staff knowledge and school practices around inclusivity. The inclusive nature of a school seems to heavily influence Mr and Mrs Jack’s SEP decision-making process. The last two quoted statements both seem to suggest that mainstream schools do not always communicate their inclusive practices and how they can accommodate for children with additional needs. Mr and Mrs Jack go onto to provide further insight into their relationship and communication with schools:

5. *“I felt like sometimes you would go to them cap in hand, slightly sort of hoping, begging, well you don’t stand there and beg, but they don’t have to be particularly professional, they don’t have to sell it”*

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The phrase “cap in hand” suggests the parents have to ask schools, in a very humble way, to provide for their son’s needs. The phrase is often used when related to money and is made with a sense of embarrassment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The use of the words “hoping” and “begging” suggest Mr and Mrs Jack are in a vulnerable place having experienced schools that are unable or unwilling to meet their son’s needs. In a traditional market structure, the customer’s needs come first. Mr and Mrs Jack’s experience of the educational provision market seems different, which they acknowledge later in the narrative:

5. *“it’s the opposite of the kind, of a customer relationship”*

Despite the links to marketisation, this quote seems to suggest that Mr and Mrs Jack do not feel like they are treated like a culturally traditional customer. The parents even go as far to say that it is the opposite, with the school almost not entering into the relationship and meeting their needs.

In contrast to these difference, other aspects of the market, like supply and demand, do still affect the customer relationship in traditional ways:

16. *“you also know the ones that are more competitive to get into, they’re not going to want your child to go there because the school is full”*

This suggests demand for certain schools outstrips supply, creating competition between parents for places as part of the decision-making process. Mr and Mrs Jack do raise one potential route out of this competition for places:

8. *“if you’re financially very buoyant, what a lot of people do if the kids are on the spectrum, they just pay for private education”*

This quote highlights that, as in traditional markets, money and finances can often afford you more choice and less competition. Without this access to finance:

8. *“you’re then left generally with the state school system which is very lottery in terms of care and provision”*

The limitation of choice related to finances, combined with the suggested aspect of luck involved in the “lottery” nature of state provision, seems to affect the parents’ experience of choice around educational provision. Mr and Mrs Jack summarise their feelings about the marketisation of educational provision and its implications for them:

49. *“you only want for your child what everyone wants for their child and you often feel like your child is left on the outside again... society is just not setup for them and you know, you feel, I feel that they should get equal access to provision”*

This quote seems to suggest the marketisation of education is reflective of their experience of society as a whole: a system setup without CYP with additional needs in mind, leaving them on the outside of society.

4.3.3. (Un)supported.

Another subject that runs through Mr and Mrs Jack’s narrative is that of support. This subject comes in many forms, including, focusing on the school ethos, provision within school, the EHCP process and advice around the SEP decision-making process. Mr and Mrs Jack provide an overall description of their experience related to support during the SEP decision-making process:

9. *“And I think our journey generally has been a lot, a lot of our, a lot of the support garnered has been through pushing and battling, constant battling...”*

Further quotes related to the idea of support are frequently mentioned throughout their narrative:

32. *“There’s no support in that process”*

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35. *"We were just left to it I think, that's very much how I felt"*

49. *"it's by your bloodied fingers that you get that support"*

These quotes highlight how unsupported and isolated the parents felt throughout the SEP decision-making process. The key words of "pushing", "constant battling" and "bloodied fingers" suggest that not only did the parents feel unsupported, but they had to operate within a system that actively seemed to be working against them. Mr and Mrs Jack summarised their experience of support as parents of a child with SEN:

35. *"And I think that just leaves most parents with children with SEN feeling quite abandoned and quite cynical."*

In contrast, Mr and Mrs Jack also talk about some of the support they did receive:

9. *"... and sometimes, occasionally with a really good SENCo. So, I think a good SENCo is also very important when you're making decisions about secondary schools. What's the SENCo like? Because they're the one that's going to be pushing for your child and being their advocate."*

The parents also recognise the limitation of SENCo support in relation to SEP decision-making:

32. *"You can't go to somebody who works, even, it's quite difficult to go to the SENCo at the school and say, what do you think would suit my child's needs, because I think they feel compromised in terms of what they recommend..."*

This quote suggests Mr and Mrs Jack recognise the ethically difficult position many professionals find themselves in when providing opinions related to SEP decision-making, but in the absence of other structured sources of support, this leaves parents alone and isolated during decision-making process.

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Later in the narrative, the parents provide their overall thoughts of support from professionals:

36. *“I think in this process, you would be lucky to meet three people who did a really good job to help you and we were lucky. Just finding that one person who was very good and then that leading onto the school our child is now at, its gold dust really”*

After expressing their thoughts about the system not being set up to support parental decision-making, they recognise how lucky they were to find an informative and supportive SENCo. Mr and Mrs Jack also express their feelings of appreciation at finding such a SENCo, and how rare it is to receive such support, through the phrase “gold dust”. The word “luck”, and the phrase “gold dust”, could suggest the vulnerability the parents feel in relation to finding a school that understands and is able to support their child’s needs.

4.3.4. **Them-and-us.**

The content of Mr and Mrs Jack’s narrative suggests an overriding narrative identity of “them and us”. With links to the previous subject of support, this narrative identity refers to how Mr and Mrs Jack actively construct different identity positions, based on context, through their retelling of the narrative. One of the feelings that came through in their retelling was about the many processes and people within the system that worked against their desire to provide for their son’s needs:

49. *“I feel like you’re victimised again as a parent of a special needs child”*

This quote positions Mr and Mrs Jack within a group of other parents of children with SEN, who are all victimised as a result of their uncontrollable situation. This form of victimisation links back to the suggestion that education and society are not set up for children with additional needs. The use of the word “again” suggests being victimised is a reoccurring experience for Mr and Mrs Jack.

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Mr and Mrs Jack go on to relate their them-and-us narrative identity to SEP decision-making:

83. *"It's not so much the decisions you need to make, it's what is put up in front of you once you've made those decisions. I think that has been the problem."*

This quote suggests the parents know what they want in regards to decision-making, but their choice is often limited by some external force. This positions the parents into an adversarial role, which the parents feel they have to take on to ensure their child's needs are met:

90. *"I'm going to articulate it and I'm going to fight it. Otherwise all those people who don't do it get brushed under the carpet, including their kids"*

Within their narrative, Mr and Mrs Jack seem to distance themselves from a few different groups and systems. The most frequently mentioned part of the system that Mr and Mrs Jack feel distanced from is the county council.

As mentioned in the support section, Mr and Mrs Jack talk about frequently pushing, battling and fighting, which was often in relation to the council. The depth of negative feelings for the council covers a wide range of areas, from the EHCP process, to providing support around the selection of SEP:

16. *"you can't ask the council about special needs provision, you can, but they will just give you a list of schools, that means nothing...."*

35. *"There was nothing from the county council as far as I'm concerned"*

91. *"They do the basic they have to do as a local authority, as a county council. They do what they need to do and that is it. That's how I feel about it anyway"*

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These quotes seem to suggest a level of inactivity or unwillingness from the council to provide information or support. Later in the narrative, Mr and Mrs Jack go even further to suggest:

35. *“I absolutely know people fought tooth and nail to get their children into schools that would cost the county council money and they have fought that parent, even though they know that that child is going to be failed by the education system and excluded, they have fought tooth and nail so they don't have to pay for that provision”*

This quote suggests the council actively fight parents even when they know their actions will ensure a child's educational failure. Mr and Mrs Jack's view that decisions are solely based on money links back to the marketisation of education, which can create difficult feelings for parents who do need additional support:

66. *“And how you're made to feel about it. You know, you're made to feel like you shouldn't, you know, somebody else asking us for support and money, you know, 'are you sure you need it?' 'Are you absolutely sure, does he really need it?' You know, it's like, you know they need it, you wouldn't be asking, it's desperation, who wants to go into a battle with a local council or school or SENCo, a teacher or anyone?”*

This quote highlights how desperate parents of CYP with SEN can become about their situation, how the system can question their ability and judgement as a parent and how uncomfortable they are about being placed in an adversarial position to try and gain some support. Interactions like these are just some examples in Mr and Mrs Jack's retelling that highlighted the them-and-us narrative identity throughout the analysis.

4.3.5. Mr and Mrs Jack's findings summary.

These findings started with the idea of marketisation of education which was present throughout the narrative. The analysis then moved onto the plotline of support, or lack of, that

threaded throughout Mr and Mrs Jack's retelling. Finally, the narrative identity of them-and-us in the narrative was explored.

4.4. Mrs Lee interview findings

4.4.1. Background and context.

This interview was conducted with Mrs Lee, who lives with her husband, two sons and a daughter. Throughout the narrative, Mrs Lee mostly talked about the decision-making process for her son Steven, who attends a mainstream secondary school. Mrs Lee also talked about her older son Matthew, who is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and attends a specialist educational provision.

4.4.2. Gaps in the system.

A consistent aspect that seemed to thread through Mrs Lee's narrative is that of gaps in the system. Two key gaps in the system mentioned are a lack of information to allow an informed choice of SEP and a lack of mainstream provision that could meet Steven's needs. Mrs Lee mentions a wide range of areas where this lack of information and provision occurred, including transport logistics, understanding of social and emotional needs and open evenings not providing a realistic school experience.

The idea of "gaps in the system" will now be explored through two areas identified through the analysis of Mrs Lee's narrative, including, "communication and interest" and "the EHCP process – 'lots of things go wrong'".

4.4.2.1 *Communication and interest.*

An example of a gap in the system comes through in Mrs Lee's experience of communication and interest in Steven. The first example of this occurs early in the narrative and relates to making contact with mainstream SENCoS. Mrs Lee highlights the importance of the relationship and communication with the school SENCo:

53. *“The SENCo is a hugely important person and one that doesn’t communicate with you is a dead loss. One that doesn’t listen to you and doesn’t respond when you try and reach out to them”*

Earlier in the narrative, Mrs Lee described her experience when she tried to communicate with one school to talk about meeting Steven’s needs and they did not reply to the email:

5. *“That I asked a question and they hadn’t even dare to even contact me, they just didn’t seem interested”*

This quote highlights a few key aspects that are reflected throughout the narrative. Mrs Lee mentions that this lack of reply from the SENCo counted as a “big thing” and raised her concerns. The use of the word “dare” could suggest the school needed courage to respond to Steven’s needs, with potential links to Mrs Lee’s previous experience of mainstream provision not being able to meet her other son’s needs. The idea of being interested in her son is repeated throughout Mrs Lee’s narrative and seems to be an important factor when choosing a SEP. Mrs Lee highlights the value she places on interest when the SENCo eventually responds to her email:

5. *“she didn’t want to ask any questions, she didn’t want to discuss it with me, she just basically said “I’m sure we can do it”, which seemed a bit like a brush off, if you see what I mean. It seems very dismissive. How can you be sure you can meet a need if you’re not sure what that need is?”*

The use of the words “brush off” and “dismissive”, not only shows a lack of interest in Steven, but also of Mrs Lee herself.

4.4.2.2 *The EHCP process – “lots of things go wrong”.*

Mrs Lee described her earlier experience of the EHCP process with Matthew as a “nightmare”. In contrast, gaining an EHCP for Steven was described as “fairly smooth”. Despite this improved experience, Mrs Lee mentions what she has learnt about the process:

18. *“The EHCP process, lots of things go wrong, lots of things don’t get done how they should be done, things fall off timescales...”*

One example of the EHCP process going wrong happened when Steven was accepted at his chosen school, who said they could meet his needs:

17. *“But when I spoke to the teacher at F school, it seems our coordinator didn’t actually send the EHCP out to either school. So, I don’t know what they were basing their decision on, as to they could meet need, because neither of them had a copy of the plan. So, I don’t know how they are able to pick”*

This quote not only highlights gaps in communication between EHCP coordinator and the schools but also suggests the schools appeared to be making uninformed decisions about being able to “meet need”. This potentially shows a lack of interest in Steven’s, with links back to the previous area of communication and interest, but could also indicate a potential lack of knowledge about SEN and how to meet specific needs. Later in the narrative, Mrs Lee reflects on her experience within the system when things go wrong:

18. *“and they don’t seem that worried about it for some reason.... When things go wrong, people should be a bit more concerned about putting it right”*

19. *“It can be difficult to get, to get your opinions across the coordinators I find as well. They’re hard to get hold of”*

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Mrs Lee seems unsure of the reason behind the lack of concern but expresses her “worry” about the gap between how the EHCP process is stated to work and the reality. This gap is widened by not being able to “get hold of” the EHCP coordinators and be listened to.

4.4.2.3 *Gaps in the system summary.*

These are just a few of the gaps in the system raised in Mrs Lee’s retelling of her decision-making experience. These findings focused on three gaps raised in Mrs Lee’s narrative that affected her SEP decision-making experience, including, things going wrong with EHCPs, a lack of interest in her son and a schools’ ability to communicate how they could meet Steven’s needs.

4.4.3. *Responsibility.*

With identified gaps in the system, Mrs Lee’s narrative suggests she took on an increasing level of responsibility to ensure Steven’s needs were understood and met through her choice of SEP. Mrs Lee frequently mentions aspects of responsibility throughout the narrative:

5. *“when children can’t necessarily communicate very well, we need to advocate for them”*

24. *“we’ve kinda almost got him to a place of stability just towards the end of primary school and we don’t want to lose this. I don’t want him to slip back.”*

28. *“It did feel like a big decision. It felt like a lot was riding on it...”*

These quotes highlight some of responsibilities Mrs Lee felt she had to take on, including, advocating for Steven, ensuring continued progress and not “*slipping back*” and making a “*big decision*” with “*a lot riding on it*”. Mrs Lee uses the word “*big*” 32 times within the narrative, which seemed to emphasise the importance of her responsibility to advocate for Steven and decide which SEP would best be able to meet his needs.

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Later in the narrative, Mrs Lee expresses her sense of being alone during the SEP decision-making process and how this increased her sense of pressure around responsibility:

29. *“it was a decision where we were very much on our own to make. There wasn’t a lot in the way of advice on what we should do. Nobody seemed to want to”*

31. *“It’s difficult, when you’re chasing so many things, to keep up with them all”*

This sense of pressure and responsibility never seemed to reduce:

21. *“I think we always had in the back of our mind, what would we do if this goes wrong?”*

59. *“... I like to look ahead and see what the potential pitfalls will be and think about how I might overcome them, rather than wait for them to arrive, because I feel that you end up in crisis management. And crisis management is very stressful”*

Mrs Lee’s sense of responsibility seems to have a profound, and potentially overwhelming, effect on her thoughts and behaviour. Mrs Lee talks about having to chase so many different things, while pre-empting any potential future issues, and planning alternative solutions. Mrs Lee seems to feel the pressure of always thinking ahead and keeping up with these additional responsibilities, with the cost of falling behind being a very stressful situation involving crisis management.

4.4.4. Pushy parent.

The narrative identity of pushy parent was highlighted through the analysis of Mrs Lee’s narrative. The narrative identity of pushy parent refers to Mrs Lee finding herself needing to impose her thoughts and feelings on those working around Steven to ensure his needs were considered and met. Mrs Lee talks about how, and questions why, the system positions her in this way:

20. *"I do feel sometimes we're made to feel like we're being kinda pushy parents and we are trying to, to, yeah, argue for more than what we should have just because we want our child's needs met. It's a very strange situation, it's, it's not very parent friendly at all"*

The word "push" and other slight variations are used 13 times throughout the narrative. Although Mrs Lee feels labelled as a "pushy parent", she also recognises the benefits of pushing within the system to ensure Steven's needs are met. It is interesting to note that Mrs Lee does not feel alone in this regard, using the pronoun "we" and the plural form of parent; suggesting Mrs Lee is not alone, and more than one parent is positioned by the system in this way. Mrs Lee goes on to explain that parents of children with additional needs are always labelled as trying, arguing and wanting more from the system. Mrs Lee seems to use the word "strange" to question why parents are positioned in this way and expresses how unfriendly the system can be. Mrs Lee also expresses her confusion about how parents, who just want their child's needs met, can be described in this way.

Later in the narrative, Mrs Lee reflects on the consequences of having to push within the system to gain suitable SEP provision:

56. *"And that's awful because it feels like a competition to get the resources your kids need and nobody wants to feel like that. You want every child to get the support they need, obviously. But you end up in a situation where the most important child to me is this one, and everyone else can argue for their child, but I'm just going to have to focus on mine"*

Mrs Lee's narrative suggests the system is unable to provide for the additional needs of every child, and positions parents into competition around resources. Mrs Lee seems uncomfortable with parents being positioned in this way, and would prefer all children had their needs met. Mrs Lee seems to reluctantly agree to "argue" for her son's needs, and take on the narrative identity of "pushy parent".

4.4.5. Mrs Lee's findings summary

The analysis first explored Mrs Lee's experience of gaps in the system, highlighted through communication issues within the system and a lack of interest in her son. Next, the plotline of responsibility was raised in relation to Mrs Lee's experience throughout the SEP decision-making process. Finally, the identity position of Mrs Lee being a pushy parent was revealed and explored.

4.5. Mr and Mrs Bing interview findings

4.5.1. Context.

Mr and Mrs Bing live at home with their son and daughter. Mr and Mrs Bing talked about their son Daniel, who is in year 7 and has moved school 4 times since starting his education. Daniel currently attends a trauma-based specialist provision. Daniel displays behavioural difficulties at home and at school. Daniel has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, neurodevelopmental disorder and has been informally associated with attachment difficulties. Mrs Bing mentioned that she had experienced domestic abuse in a previous relationship when she was pregnant with Daniel.

4.5.2. Being listened to and heard.

Throughout the narrative, the plotline of being listened to and heard was raised by Mr and Mrs Bing. The first example of this content in the narrative referred to suitable provision for Daniel. Mr and Mrs Bing expressed their clear sense of what provision would work for Daniel through phrases like, "*I think we already knew that school wasn't going to be right*", "*wasn't the right way to go*", "*we need them to*", "*so, that wasn't really an option*" and "*it's just not doable*". These phrases highlight the parent's sense of what would work and the right kind of provision their son needed. These examples also highlight that their position was often in contrast to provision suggestions or availability. Phrases such as "*it was to try*", "*it didn't*

really work” and *“didn’t wanna let him go”* also highlight the distance between the positions of the parents and those within the system.

This retelling suggests some of the differences in perspectives between the parents and those within the system could be due to communication issues. Mr and Mrs Bing’s sense of not being listened to by other people in the system is a consistent aspect in the narrative:

35. *“we knew that we, our voices alone weren't being heard necessarily. So, we almost needed a little bit of backup from somewhere else just to say look, he's got a lot going on. He needs the extra support. The previous school weren't getting it when he first went there, they weren't getting that he was in need of additional help”*

Mr and Mrs Bing state that their voices alone were not enough as they were not being heard or listened to about their need for support. Experiences like these motivated Mr and Mrs Bing to consider applying for an EHCP.

4.5.2.1 *Being listened to and heard through the EHCP.*

Mr and Mrs Bing talk about their experience of seeking support through an EHCP:

44. *“coming to terms that your child is going to be on EHCP is quite hard anyway. Because everyone wants the apparent “normal” child. But it's just a case of having to. It was a massive step for us. In accepting as well”*

This quote gives a sense of the “massive step” the parents had to go through to even consider applying for an EHCP. The word “accepting” suggests a shift in identity positioning, which could potentially work on a number of levels, including, accepting their son and his needs, accepting that they need support and accepting not being listened to without backup. Despite their initial concerns, Mr and Mrs Bing acknowledged the value of the EHCP:

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25. *“if we didn't have that bit of paper, life would be so much harder. Yeah, because that, although it's a bit of paper, that opens up so many different avenues for him as much as we were worried about getting one”*

This quote suggests a shift in opportunity the EHCP created for Mr and Mrs Bing and their son. One example of this shift in opportunity involved the parents being listened to:

67. *“We've been crying out for people to listen to us for so long and then everyone is, and everyone is on side and saying yes you're right, which we hadn't heard for so long. Which was strange”*

While acknowledging the benefits of the EHCP, and its role in providing them with a voice, the parents also questioned why people were now listening to them:

35. *“But at the time, it was quite a, quite nice to finally feel like we were being listened to, whether that was because they were listening to us because of us, or whether they were listening to us because of the EHCP being sorted, we don't and we'll never know. But at the point of us saying, we're going for the EHCP, was sort of when things started to change, not necessarily for the better, but things changed”*

Mr and Mrs Bing seem to question why they were suddenly being listened to. They seem to question whether they were actually being listened to for their opinion, or if people within the system were listening due to the EHCP. This could suggest Mr and Mrs Bing feel they were being heard, but not listened to, as a result of the EHCP.

Mr and Mrs Bing seem to continue positioning themselves outside of the system in relation to being listened to. Originally it was the school that were being listened to, but now it is the EHCP that is being listened to. Despite these concerns, Mr and Mrs Bing still felt heard, which provided an increased sense of control when selecting SEP:

37. *“Which again, would be under our control as well rather than us putting down a list of three schools and send it off and hoping that he gets in one of them”*

4.5.3. Professionals and diagnoses.

Daniel had experienced support from a wide range of professionals, but Mr and Mrs Bing raised some concerns about their involvement. Mr and Mrs Bing described their experience of working with some professionals:

40. *“You feel like with some people, you go into a clinical environment and you tell him how it is and it's very, what is the word I'm looking for, Edgy. You're not sure your saying the right thing. Are they going to have problems with this? Are you a good enough parent?”*

The use of the phrase “*clinical environment*” seems to reflect a medical, possibly cold, feeling about the physical experience of working with some professionals. Mr and Mrs Bing use the word “*edgy*”, which suggests that they could sometimes be nervous in the company of some professionals, to the point where they started to question themselves. Mr and Mrs Bing convey a sense of a right and a wrong way of doing or saying things, which if not adhered to, can create “*problems*” with professionals.

Mr and Mrs Bing go on to talk about their experience of working with a paediatrician to talk about their concerns for Daniel:

44. *“That was a massive step and then we got knocked back, and he said, because you need to go and sort your parenting out. Which was, wow ok, we really thought something was going on.”*

This encounter shows how Mr and Mrs Bing shared their concerns for Daniel with the paediatrician, but instead of valuing their ideas, the professional questioned their parenting skills. This provides one example of how professionals in Mr and Mrs Bing’s narrative tried to reposition and change Mr and Mrs Bing’s sense of identity as parents. Despite this

professional's efforts to reposition them, Mr and Mrs Bing go onto reposition themselves by linking this criticism of their parenting, to a specific diagnosis:

63. *"There's so much you have to really, really push for with a diagnosis like that. because everybody is all eyes on you actually, is it your fault that he behaved like this, is he doing this because this isn't right. It's horrendous"*

67. *"Because of how people perceive attachment. People, they have already made their judgement, they have already made their decision and I have a real issue with this word now. Attachment."*

Mr and Mrs Bing talk about the complex and "horrendous" process of getting a diagnosis of attachment difficulties. The parents raise the issue of negative social perceptions associated with the condition and how they affected their experience of the process. Similar to their experience with the paediatrician, Mr and Mrs Bing feel a sense of everybody observing, questioning and judging them as parents. The combination of these experiences around attachment seems to have changed their identity, especially for Mrs Bing, as highlighted through Mr Bing's summary:

68. *"she hears attachment as your fault"*

Mrs Bing responds by saying:

68. *"Because that's always how it's been perceived to me. And as soon as people hear that's the diagnosis. They're like, oh so what went wrong in your life then?"*

These statements suggest Mrs Bing's own construction of self as a parent has been affected by other people's perceptions and judgements, which seems to have repositioned Mr and Mrs Bing's sense of identity as parents. The word "always" suggests the long-term nature of these perceptions and its potential impact on their identity positioning.

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Mr and Mrs Bing go onto talk about how their next experience with the paediatrician was in stark contrast to the first:

44. *“A year later we went back and he said, we will do this, this and this and all of a sudden, he was a different person”*

Mr and Mrs Bing were surprised by this sudden shift in perspective by the paediatrician, going as far to say it was like a *“different person”*. This experience also exposed the parents to the variation in professional interpretations of attachment:

71. *“I don't think I know a professional out of all of the people that I work with that view that the same”*

Despite this variation, Mr and Mrs Bing acknowledge the value of the diagnosis on their SEP decision-making process:

59. *“I think the only reason we got him in there on a draft plan is because his paediatrician diagnosed him with the attachment stuff and obviously, being a trauma-based school, you have to have an attachment diagnosis. Which our son had, but nothing was formal. So, the paediatrician actually helped with that part”*

Mr and Mrs Bing's acknowledge that access to certain schools is not based just on observed needs, but also linked to a diagnosis. Mr and Mrs Bing's experience with professionals has not always been helpful, but they were able to help with the SEP decision-making process.

4.5.4. Parental inclusion and relationships.

The narrative identity of parental inclusion was raised through the analysis of Mr and Mrs Bing's interview. The term parental inclusion in this research refers to how Mr and Mrs Bing feel they were included, or excluded, in aspects of the system related to SEP decision-

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making. Mr and Mrs Bing talk about how their experience of inclusion was mostly affected through relationships within the system.

The first relationship Mr and Mrs Bing talk about is with Daniel's current school staff:

12. *"His class teachers, I called them the dream team, because the three of them, I, they just amaze me because there is, they just bounce off each other and all their ideas work and they've got so much time for the for the kids"*

This quote highlights the value Mr and Mrs Bing place on the relationships around Daniel's support. The parent's appreciation of support from the class teacher is further highlighted later in the narrative:

14. *"he's just such a down-to-earth guy, nice guy. He just he rings us, talks to you like you've known him forever and just makes you, makes you comfortable with, and he is reassuring as well"*

This suggests Mr and Mrs Bing appreciate a more personal and inclusive relationship with school staff. The phrase "*down-to-earth*" suggests that they can relate to him, with frequent references to feeling assured when working and communicating with school Staff. Mr and Mrs Bing's need for support and reassurance seem to mostly fall into the social and emotional side of parenting:

25. *"they phone up, like once a week, to check up on how we're doing. Just really silly things that I think are..."*

40. *"It's just those little things again, just remind you that you've done the right thing"*

The focus of the call around how Mr and Mrs Bing are doing emphasises what they recall as important. These quotes also suggest the parents are concerned about things they think are important, but others may perceive as "*really silly things*". Mr and Mrs Bing seem to feel

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included and validated by the school staff, who focus on the “*little things*” the parents find important. These quotes also contain elements of doubt, highlighting an identity position that could link back to Mr and Mrs Bing’s previous experience with professionals. Further links to these previous experiences are highlighted in quote later in the narrative:

41. *“you’re not judged. you’re not being judged. they know that you struggle. That’s not any fault of your own necessarily, people ask for help, why shouldn’t you ask for help?”*

This quote seems to express an openness and honesty about Mr and Mrs Bing’s current experience and their need for support. Mr and Mrs Bing use the word “*people*” to suggest they are not the only ones who struggle and it is OK to ask for help; and when they do ask for help, those within the system will listen to them without judgement or blame. Language from previous negative experiences, like “*judged*” and “*fault*”, are now replaced with different words like “*struggle*” and “*help*”; creating a sense of an inclusive relationship between the parents and the school, allowing them to work together and feel supported. The benefits of providing an inclusive and non-judgemental relationship are highlighted later in the narrative:

42. *“And that’s just what we needed, it was like a breath of fresh air, just a little bit of reassurance that the battle we facing isn’t, we’re not the only ones doing it”*

The idiom of “*a breath of fresh air*” suggests this experience of an inclusive and non-judgemental relationship was new to Mr and Mrs Bing and provided just what they needed.

4.5.5. Mr and Mrs Bing’s findings summary.

Mr and Mrs Bing’s findings first explored the content of being listened to and heard in the narrative, which was further explored through being listened to and heard through the EHCP. Next, Mr and Mrs Bing’s experience with professionals and diagnoses was explored, before finally moving onto the narrative identity of parental inclusion and relationships.

4.6. Mr Blake interview findings

4.6.1. Context.

Mr Blake lives at home with his wife and they are both foster parents. Mr Blake currently looks after three boys on a long-term placement and described himself as their primary caregiver. All three boys have EHCPs. Mr Blake has recently gone through the SEP decision-making process for one of the boys, but during the interview, he talks about his SEP decision-making experiences for all three boys. Mr Blake stated that his current role is a full-time foster parent, but he was previously a businessman, running and managing a range of different companies.

4.6.2. Taking a business approach.

Mr Blake talks about taking a business approach to the SEP decision-making process and other associated aspects of providing educational provision for his three boys. Mr Blake summarises his approach later on within the narrative:

29. *“I have the ability, I suppose, really to look at it very factually rather than emotionally so everything that I did was driven with a goal, now having made the decision, and some people focus on something and do not take in the big picture, but I felt I looked at the big picture and this guy needs to get into society, this guy needs to get into society and a little bit of education...”*

35. *“So, I championed it and took it on board because that’s what I do, I used to run businesses, I just do it”*

Mr Blake states his ability to remove emotions, view the process in a factual way and take in the “*big picture*”. These qualities help him to “*drive*” towards the “*goal*” of providing what his guy’s “*needs*”. This use of the word “*champion*” could suggest that Mr Blake is an ardent defender of his boy’s needs; although this word could also suggest that Mr Blake views

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the procedures, processes and rules of the system as a game. An example of this link to games is through the phrase “*just do it*” which is a trademark of the sports shoe company Nike. Earlier in the narrative, Mr Blake talks about how he works within the system to achieve his goal:

7. “...*having been in business, you know what has to be done to get, you focus on what needs to be done and that’s where you put all your energies and do everything to make it happen.... So, no hanging around waiting for postage, it was just, so, it was just. And of course, the other thing is pressure. Just pressure, pressure, pressure and then they know you’re not going to go. The noisy axel gets the grease doesn’t it?*”

8. “...*you just make yourself a bloody nuisance really.*”

In the first quote, Mr Blake highlights his approach to the process of gaining support by combining his understanding of the system, with what he wants for his boys. Mr Blake uses a proverb similar to “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”, which expresses that the loudest problems are the ones mostly likely to get the attention. Through this quote, Mr Blake seems to acknowledge capacity issues within the education system, which can make it difficult to be heard. Mr Blake overcomes this by applying “*pressure*” and being “*a bloody nuisance*”.

Using this strategy, Mr Blakes expresses what he needed to focus his energies on during this process:

6. “*I wanted to make sure I could give them the best that they could. So, the first thing was to get them both EHCPs*

Mr Blake expresses how difficult it is to get an EHCP and takes a business perspective as to why:

2. “*One had an EHCP when they arrived, the other two didn’t, so we had to take that process on board, which was quite difficult, because it’s very hard to get them now, because*

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they just can't, it's nobody's fault, there just isn't the money, there just isn't the money. I don't care, how are, you say the council aren't doing this..... just imagine this is your business, Britain is a business, you have X coming in and you have X going out, you have to balance the books, you can't just do what governments do, they just keep borrowing, but the banks will eventually say, wow, your business cannot borrow any more money, you know"

Through this quote, Mr Blake seems to remove personal aspects out of the process and views it as a system that is financially driven. Mr Blake suggests the key reason that gaining an EHCP is hard is that councils' need to "*balance the books*". This rationalisation of the system seems to help Mr Blake understand and accept its limitations around providing additional support.

4.6.3. Emotions and dissonance.

Mr Blake mentions that he is able to take a business approach and distance himself from emotions, focusing on the factual aspects of the decision-making process. Despite this, the role of emotions is a plotline that frequently appears throughout Mr Blake's narrative. The word emotion and other variants are mentioned 30 times throughout Mr Blake's narrative.

Also linked to emotions, is the narrative identity of dissonance. Mr Blake seems to struggle with the opposing identity positions of experiencing emotions while wanting to operate in a factual way. Mr Blake describes foster parenting as a job but his narrative suggests the role requires him to be more emotionally involved than in business:

3. *"Emotionally, I was involved, but as I said earlier, I don't think to the same level as a parent... As a foster parent, you are emotionally involved, but, to 20%"*

Through this quote, Mr Blake highlights how he perceives his relationship with the boys as a foster parent and tries to distance himself from emotional involvement. This emotional distance is suggested to benefit Mr Blake's perspective:

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16. *"I'm looking at it from a different viewpoint, not an emotional viewpoint, but a much more understanding of life viewpoint."*

30. *"...I don't feel we are a normal family as such, because yes, we love the boys, yes, we want them, but we, I have the ability, I suppose, really, to look at it very factually rather than emotionally. So, everything that I did was driven with a goal."*

Mr Blake uses factual and objective language, while also using the word "love", which is a strong and positive emotional state. Mr Blake acknowledges these opposing positions through his feeling that they are not a "normal family", although the suggestion they are a family could suggest an emotional aspect to the relationships. Mr Blake talks directly about emotions later in the narrative:

32. *"...again, from a parent's point of view, you've got this horrendous thing called emotion, which is greying the whole outlook."*

Mr Blake positions himself in regards to the role of emotion as a parent. The use of the word "horrendous" highlights how Mr Blake perceives the extreme impact emotions can have on perceptions. The word "greying" could also suggest the dark and negative influence emotions can have on perspectives.

Mr Blake does make a direct acknowledgement of an emotional thought during his SEP decision-making process later in the narrative:

26. *"I've managed to get these guys the school places because they need them, but it did cross my mind... I've taken that place away from them. So, that was an emotional thought I had, do I want to do that? Well I've got to because I have to champion my guys, I have to give them the best I possibly can because that's what I'm paid for."*

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This direct mention of an emotional thought is overcome by a rationalisation process, that can be linked to taking a business approach, through the phrase *“that’s what I’m paid for”*. The internal conflict between emotional and factual content in this quote could also be directly linked to a narrative identity of dissonance.

Later in the narrative, Mr Blake revisits these emotional thoughts by talking about how certain parents might struggle to navigate the system and gain suitable educational provision for their child:

34. *“they don’t have the ability or knowledge, the understanding about how to go about it, so, they’re never going to be able to access those schools, which is so sad because their child probably desperately needs to.”*

Mr Blake seems to acknowledge the unequal nature of the system and how it can exclude certain individuals through no fault of their own. Mr Blake expresses his emotions for these parents through sadness and empathy for the desperate situation they might be going through when trying to find suitable educational provision.

Mr Blake also talks about the role of emotion as a foster parent:

35. *“fostering children is quite intensive”*

5. *“We had to change the way we approached fostering because my wife was getting very emotionally involved with the children. So, when they were leaving, it was like a bereavement in the family. So, we had to stop that because it was becoming too distressing...”*

Mr Blake goes onto explain how his emotional involvement is different to his wife’s:

5. *“I could keep them slightly distanced, if that makes sense, from your heart. If there was a little door, you close it. You open a bit, but not too much, and as you understand more, maybe because, that could be a bit of a nightmare...”*

Parental narratives around decision-making

Mr Blake's overall point of keeping emotional distance could be contrasted with some of the language he uses. The first sentence changes possession from Mr Blake owning the emotional distance, to you owning the heart. This shift could just be explained by Mr Blake's natural spoken language, but it could also highlight his struggle to keep his boys out of his heart. Mr Blake acknowledges the importance of an emotional connection, but also his desire to control this aspect of his relationship with the boys. This desire for control could help Mr Blake avoid certain feelings associated with "*nightmares*" like fear, despair, anxiety and great sadness. Another potential link to nightmares could be made about what Mr Blake has learnt through his foster parent training and about what his boys had been through emotionally:

12. *"I did learn with all three of our boys, because it's so traumatising, so badly damaged, and things like the foster parent training help you to recognise and understand all of that."*

Mr Blake also talks about the emotional struggles his boys' have:

25. *"the emotional and all the trauma and all the stuff they've left with that has these long-term effects."*

Mr Blake goes on to talk about his direct experience of the long-term effects of emotional trauma have on the boys' development:

26. *"I'm still frightened they're not going to get to where I want them to be..."*

As the narrative continues, Mr Blake expresses more of his emotions related to the boys' progress:

33. *"Although I still have massive challenges as a parent coming to terms with the fact that these guys are going to be nowhere in life, that's something I struggle with..."*

Mr Blake also raises concerns about the impact he can have on their progress:

33. *“you give them every support you can, I’m on these guys to do well and all the time the biggest issue is disappointment. They just keep disappointing me. They don’t know that, but internally, and that’s a bit of a drain, you build yourself up for doing really well, they don’t do really well...”*

35. *“After all this time, we still haven’t been able to get these guys out of this hypervigilant mode, and they are constantly in it. Terrible, terrible, what the hell have they been through? I found that difficult to come to terms with, to understand.”*

Mr Blake expresses his struggle about overcoming aspects of the boys’ past which continues to have an impact on their progress. Mr Blake displays his continued optimism and hope, despite his repeated disappointments, but also recognises the potential long-term effects of these experiences:

35. *“That’s the downside of this job, because you, if you’re not careful, you can make yourself think you’re failing them.”*

Through this quote, Mr Blake seems to express a core part of his emotional struggle when supporting his boys. Mr Blake wants his boys to progress, but he also feels the need to be “careful” and manage his own expectations. Mr Blake’s emotional drive of wanting the best for his boys is in contrast to his objective view of needing to manage his expectations about their progress. Mr Blake’s fear of failing the boys seems to be a key emotional driver that limits his ability to manage his expectations. This example of Mr Blake’s continual struggle to balance his emotional and objective thoughts could provide further support for the narrative identity of dissonance.

4.6.4. Mr Blake's findings summary.

These findings first discussed the plotline of Mr Blake taking a business approach to experiences around the SEP decision-making process. The analysis then moved onto the role of emotions, and the narrative identity of dissonance, within Mr Blake's narrative.

5. Discussion

5.1. Chapter overview

This chapter will discuss areas raised in the analysis of this research. To help guide the discussion, the research question is revisited:

“What narratives do parents of children with an EHCP provide when asked about their decision-making journey of choosing SEP?”

This chapter will start by discussing the analysis of each interview separately and make links to previous research; with the aim of developing understanding of the current research, and placing it into the context of existing literature. The discussion then moves onto aspects of trustworthiness through member checking, reflexivity and limitations of the research. This chapter will then discuss the implications of this research on EP practice and potential directions for future research. Finally, conclusions are drawn about the current research.

5.2. Introduction

This research was conducted from a relativist, social constructivist paradigm. This stance makes the assumption that an individuals' learning first takes place at the social level (e.g., through interactions and being part of groups) and continues to develop on an individual level (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach allowed this research to explore each informant's own unique “truth”, that is influenced by their knowledge, background and culture. To facilitate this approach, each interview was analysed and discussed separately; revealing

each informant's own "truth" about their SEP decision-making experience, and respecting each narrative as a unique experience that cannot be generalised.

One aspect of this research worth noting before the discussion is that interviews with informants were conducted after they had made the decision about SEP. This resulted in parents talking about their current understanding of the SEP decision-making experience. Parents did not always talk directly about their SEP decision and sometimes talked about aspects they felt were related to their experience of the process. This resulted in narratives that seemed to move away from the research question, but were considered relevant to these parents, when asked about their SEP decision-making experience.

5.3. Positioning theory

A central part of the NOI approach is identity positioning, which is based on positioning theory, as outlined in the analysis section. Due to the importance of positioning theory, and its frequent presence in the analysis of the four narratives below, it was considered useful to briefly revisit this theory. Positioning theory looks to explore how people use language through discourse to locate themselves and others in a social world, while claiming certain rights, and assigning duties on others (Harré, 2012; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010). Identity positions reflect the fact that not everyone has equal access to rights and duties, which can have moral implications, like assigning a person or a group as being trusted or distrusted, with-us or against-us (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010). Positioning theory is outlined here and will be referred to throughout the discussion of each informants' narrative.

5.4. Discussion of Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative

5.4.1. Introduction.

To help guide the discussion, the three areas discussed in the analysis of Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative were; their experiences of the marketisation of education; their experience of being (un)supported; their positioning and narrative identity of them-and-us.

Referring to the research question, it is interesting to note that Mr and Mrs Jack state that the actual decision-making of SEP was quite straightforward, it was the barriers placed in front of them once they had made a decision that was a problem. This highlights the variety and complexity of experiences related to parental decision-making of SEP, which is reflected in the broad range of areas Mr and Mrs Jack discussed in response to the research question.

5.4.2. The marketisation of education.

Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative was filled with references and language that could be linked to the marketisation of education. The past thirty years has seen educational provision marketplaces become established in many western societies (Pratt, 2016). The Education Reform Act (1998) radically transformed education in Britain through the creation of a market for educational provision. The two main aims of this policy change were to raise standards by shifting control of resources to schools and away from LAs and create greater parental choice of educational provision. Although the impact of these intended benefits have been debated (Bradley & Taylor, 2002).

Mr and Mrs Jack's first reference to the marketisation of education is through the language they used in relation to SENCOs. Mr and Mrs Jack talk about SENCOs being "professional" and "passionate", with the ability to "sell" their provision and how it can meet the needs of CYPs. Through their discourse, Mr and Mrs Jack highlight their belief that SENCOs have a duty to promote their school and its inclusive practices (Harré, 2012). Curran's

(2019) research suggests SENCOs have had to take on a range of additional role since the introduction of the CoP. Mr and Mrs Jack's suggestion that SENCOs have a duty to promote their school, could add additional responsibility to the role, which were not raised in the literature. The expectations Mr and Mrs Jack place on SENCOs could also reflect the critical perspective parents of CYP with SEN are reported to take when reviewing mainstream provision (Byrne, 2013).

Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative suggests they perceived themselves as consumers in the educational provision marketplace, but they also recognise that it is not like a traditional customer relationship. Existing literature highlights that a quasi-marketplace for secondary education in Britain has developed over the last 30 years (Institute for Education, 2012). Quasi-markets differ from conventional markets in three key ways; providers are not necessarily profit generating; choice can be exercised on behalf of the user; spending is limited by budgets and not wealth. All three of these quasi-market qualities have links to Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative, but a combination of the last two, seem to play a significant part in their experience as consumers.

The quasi-market quality of having choice exercised on behalf of Mr and Mrs Jack can be explored through the CoP and the idea of autonomy. The CoP is suggested to have been written with a business-like agenda, using language that lacks clarity around choice and preferences (Lehane, 2017). This potentially makes parents feel like private consumers, with a greater choice in all aspects of their child's education, including provision (Hellawell, 2017). Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative suggests that they feel like consumers but they also recognised that some restrictions were placed on their choice of school. These restrictions can be explored further through the idea of autonomy, which is the possession of control an individual has over their life and its direction (Duncan, 2009). Autonomy can be considered at three levels; autonomy of thought, which is the capacity to think and reason; autonomy of will, which is the

ability to perform intended actions; autonomy of action, which is the ability to act freely on intentions (Duncan, 2009). The idea of autonomy is well supported within the CoP, placing importance on parental views, wishes and decisions (Department for Education, 2015). Despite this support with the CoP, a range of factors can influence parental autonomy around SEP decision-making.

One factor that can influence parent autonomy of SEP provision choice is related to the second quality of a quasi-market, that spending is related to budgets and not wealth. Mr and Mrs Jack state that one of the barriers during their decision-making process was considerations about the cost of provision. This could suggest that Mr and Mrs Jack had the autonomy of thought and will around SEP decision-making, but considerations of budgets had disrupted their autonomy of action (Duncan, 2009). Mr and Mrs Jack's experience of budgets affecting educational provision is well supported in the literature; with a disparity between identifying needs, and providing appropriate provision often associated with budgetary constraints (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

The moral implications of associating budgets with educational provision will be discussed shortly, but first, the nature of this discourse will be discussed using the idea of framing. For Mr and Mrs Jack, the practice of framing educational provision through financial constraints seems to have its origins in the language used by those within the system. A frame involves selecting an aspect of a perceived reality and make it more noticeable through communication (Entman, 1993). Framing can be used for a range of functions like promoting a problem definition or causal interpretation. In the context of SEP decision-making, communication around provision using financial constraints can highlight the problem of limited funding, but also suggest a causal reason for limited provision choice.

Coming back to the moral implications, framing discourses around provision using the perspective of budgets has links to the fair distribution of resources through the idea of distributive justice (Fox et al., 2007). Within the context of SEN, an increase in demand for resources, combined with reduced budgets, means there are not enough resources to meet all CYPs' additional needs (Hellowell, 2017; Sales & Vincent, 2018).. As a result, decisions have to be made about how to fairly distribute resources, which can be linked to budgets and cost.

The framing of provision discourse around budgets potentially comes at the cost of social justice, and moves communication away from equality of opportunity and CYPs needs (Bemak & Chung, 2005). This distributive justice way of framing provision discourse has the consequence of disrupting Mr and Mrs Jack's autonomy of action by making decisions based on the cost of provision, rather than their son's needs, and limiting their choice of SEP.

5.4.3. (Un)supported.

Mr and Mrs Jack expressed the fact they felt mostly unsupported, by formal sources of support within the system, during the SEP decision-making process; although they did feel supported by informal sources like friends, family, other parents of CYP with SEN and support groups. Research around support for parental decision-making of SEP has received little attention. The literature in this area has mostly focused on the influence of school staff and professionals on decision-making, rather than how they can support parents during the process (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Cole, 2007; Kenny et al., 2005; Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, 1995). Mr and Mrs Jack acknowledge the fact that asking for opinions about provision can place professionals in an ethically challenging position due to a wide range of potential reasons, like knowing how a school provides for specific needs (Harré, 2012; Hellowell, 2019). While acknowledging these ethical concerns, this lack of support from within the system during their SEP decision-making experience, made them feel "abandoned and quite cynical", which is a parental experience reflected in the literature (Skipp & Hopwood, 2006).

Despite a lack of support, parents in Adams et al's (2018) highlighted that one individual can dramatically change the parent experience of the EHCP process, which SEP decision-making can be a part of. Parents in Adams et al's (2018) study benefitted from a person who provided information, support and advice, were proactive and took ownership of the process. This echoes Mr and Mrs Jack experience, who mentioned that they had some support from a SENCo, which influenced their SEP decision-making process. Mr and Mrs Jack met many SENCos on their decision-making journey and expressed how lucky they were to find that one supportive person during the process. This suggests a lack of consistency within the system and the potential for parents to go unsupported during the SEP decision-making process.

5.4.4. Them-and-us.

The narrative identity of them-and-us was highlighted as threading throughout Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative. Mr and Mrs Jack seem to take on a range of positions in relation to different individuals, organisations, services, groups and processes (Harré, 2012; Hiles et al., 2009). Through their narrative, Mr and Mrs Jack expressed a range of identity positions that were aligned with certain groups, and opposed to others (Harré, 2012).

Mr and Mrs Jack expressed how they tried to source a SEP that could meet their son's needs, but they often experienced barriers to achieving this goal. The ideas of social justice, and the biological lottery, can help explore an aspect of positioning within Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative. The biological lottery is the distribution of advantages and disadvantages of outcomes as the result of biological factors (Fox et al., 2007). Mr and Mrs Jack's son has been diagnosed with autism, which could be described as a biological condition. Autism is a condition that has a range of associated additional needs that need to be considered when selecting educational provision. Mr and Mrs Jack understand what these needs are, although they have no control over them, and how they could be met through educational provision. Mr and Mrs Jack express their understanding of the CoP, and the underlying social justice principle

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of providing all CYP with equal opportunities to engage and progress within education. Despite these guiding legal requirement, Mr and Mrs Jack did not always experiences these principles being applied by some aspects of the system (e.g. SENCOs, schools, the LA). The combination of the biological lottery, and lack of social justice within the system, seemed to position Mr and Mrs Jack into limiting their choice of SEP through no fault of their own.

Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative can be further explored by linking the ideas of the biological lottery, with the marketisation of education and distributive justice framing around provision. These ideas combined create a situation where Mr and Mrs Jack felt, through no fault of their own, they were denied the support they needed for their son due to financial reasons (Fox et al., 2007). Through this lack of support, Mr and Mrs Jack feel positioned, along with other parents of CYP with SEN, into a marginalised and victimised group (Harré, 2012). In response, Mr and Mrs Jack take on the narrative identity of them-and-us to ensure their son's needs are met through their chosen provision; expressing how they will advocate for their son by articulating their view, and if needed, by fighting and battling (Hiles et al., 2009).

Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative highlighted their adversarial relationship with the LA. Views in the literature about parent relationships with the LA are mixed. Some parents expressed some good communication and effort from LAs; while others highlighted poor working relationships, a lack of engagement and reduced parental inclusion (Adams et al., 2018; Duncan, 2003; Stevenson, 2005; Truss, 2008). Mr and Mrs Jack's experience of having to fight and battle to ensure their son's needs are met were also shared by parents in the literature (Adams et al., 2018; Penfold, Cleghorn, Tennant, Palmer, & Read, 2009; Truss, 2008). Adams et al (2018) highlights that an adversarial relationship between parents and a LA can disadvantage some parents over others; requiring parents to have an informed and confident approach, which allows them to engage and challenge the different systems and professionals involved in the process. Mr and Mrs Jack acknowledge this lack of equality, and how lucky

they were to be in a position that enabled them to engage with the unbalanced system and secure suitable provision for their son; highlighting a potential benefit of taking on the narrative identity of them-and-us (Harré, 2012; Hiles et al., 2009).

5.5. Discussion of Mrs Lee's narrative

5.5.1. Introduction.

The analysis of Mrs Lee's narrative raised the three areas of; gaps in the system, which was further explored through Mrs Lee's communication with those in the system and their interest in her son; responsibility; the narrative identity of pushy parent. These areas will now be discussed separately and linked to previous research.

5.5.2. Gaps in the system.

Mrs Lee talked about her experience of feeling alone and unsupported during the SEP decision-making experience. In addition to this lack of support, Mrs Lee identified gaps in the system which did not provide the information, or the process structure, to help support her SEP decision-making process. These gaps in the system potentially contributed toward feelings of stress and anticipatory anxiety Mrs Lee experienced during the process. Two specific gaps in the system raised in the analysis were a lack of information to inform SEP decision-making and a lack of suitable mainstream provision choice.

Since the introduction of the CoP, there has been no research that focuses on support for parents of CYP with an EHCP around the SEP decision-making. Sales and Vincent's (2018) study did not address parental decision-making of SEP, but did mention how parents were generally happy and felt included in the EHCP process. However, Sales and Vincent's (2018) study was based on a small sample of parents who were already aware and engaged with support in the system through a local parent partnership service, which may have influenced the generally positive experience of the process.

Views from school staff and professionals in the literature do potentially offer some of the reasons behind Mrs Lee's experience of gaps in the system. One potential reason is related to how the CoP changes were introduced too early, lacked clarity and required a lot of changes; which was confusing at times, and not always supported through training (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran, 2019; Curran et al., 2017; Hellawell, 2017; Palikara et al., 2019; Whalley, 2018). This lack of clarity and confusion was further enhanced by the different ways LA implemented the CoP, creating a localised nature of implementation and support (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018). These factors combined could have contributed towards Mrs Lee's experience of gaps in the system when making decisions around SEP. Although most of this literature refers to when the CoP and EHCPs were first introduced in 2014, which may have changed over the past 5-6 years.

Mrs Lee's narrative highlights that finding suitable mainstream provision was a key gap in the system that affected her SEP decision-making experience. Part of this gap involved SENCo's knowledge of SEN and inclusive practices. Mrs Lee stated that she often received uninformed, dismissive and unhelpful responses to her questions when asking SENCo's about their inclusive practices. Concerns around SENCo knowledge, and their inclusive practices, has been acknowledged within the literature; with suggested reasons behind it including a lack of time, training, importance allocated to the SENCo role, varying perceptions of SEN and a lack of guidance from the CoP (Adams et al., 2017; Byrne, 2013; Curran et al., 2017; Whalley, 2018). This variability in SENCo knowledge of SEN ultimately limited Mrs Lee's choice of suitable mainstream SEP, which was a gap in the system that affected her decision-making experience.

The CoP places a high priority on aspects related to inclusion, stating that schools have a responsibility to "ensure that children and young people with SEN engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEN" (p.92, Department for Education, 2015).

This again provides a broad statement from the CoP with few details around implementing an inclusive practice. To help bridge this gap, guidance and training could be beneficial. The literature suggests guidance and training was available to some SENCOs around the CoP changes, which was mostly provided by LAs (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017). Although some SENCOs in the literature either did not value the LA training, or did not have access to this support, like those in academies that are outside LA control (Curran, 2019; Curran et al., 2017). Curran (2019) also found that some SENCOs were working in isolation when implementing CoP changes. It could be the case that Mrs Lee was in an area where school SENCOs were still adjusting to the changes, did not receive support or training around the CoP changes or viewed the implications from the CoP differently to Mrs Lee. These factors individually, or combined, could have contributed toward Mrs Lee's experience of gaps in the system during her SEP decision-making experience.

Mrs Lee's narrative highlights a repositioning of the SENCO role with additional responsibilities, like the need to communicate with parents about the CoP changes, which is a finding supported in the literature (Curran, 2019). Mrs Lee's narrative contradicts the past idea that SENCO are of low status as she mentions how "hugely important" they were to her SEP decision-making process (Curran et al., 2017). Mrs Lee places a high value on the ability of SENCOs to listen, communicate and show a genuine interest in her and her son. Mrs Lee's interaction with SENCOs allowed her to gauge their knowledge of SEN, the inclusive practices they implemented at their school and the suitability of the school for her son. Mrs Lee's narrative suggests this process was challenging and time consuming, but it helped inform her SEP decision-making process by removing some schools from consideration.

Despite Mrs Lee's positioning of SENCO as "hugely important", this view may not have been shared by school staff. SENCOs in a few studies suggested that they struggled to communicate the CoP change and influence staff to implement the new reforms (Curran, 2019;

Hellawell, 2019). This could suggest some school staff were not aware, or interested, in their responsibilities as laid out in the CoP. If the SENCos Mrs Lee experienced were not supported by staff, this may have been reflected through their communication when talking about the inclusive practices at their school. Mrs Lee's experience could also suggest that Curran et al's (2017) findings, that staff were becoming more proactive and developing stronger relationships with pupils and parents, is still a work in progress for some schools.

5.5.3. Responsibility.

The analysis of Mrs Lee's narrative highlighted her sense of responsibility. Mrs Lee perceived SEP decision-making as a big responsibility with a lot riding on it; ensuring that a chosen SEP would support her son's needs, and facilitate his development.

Mrs Lee's narrative suggests she felt positioned into taking on additional responsibilities during the SEP decision-making process to ensure suitable provision was allocated (Harré, 2012). These additional responsibilities link back to the idea of gaps in the system. For example, Mrs Lee expresses how many people within the system did not seem to take their responsibility under the CoP seriously, reflected through their lack of interest and ability to provide for her son and his needs.

In response to this lack of perceived responsibility, Mrs Lee spent time thinking about the potential upcoming pitfalls and created backup plans she might need if things went wrong. Placing these experiences into context, these additional responsibilities came at a time when Mrs Lee was simultaneously seeking educational provision for two of her sons with additional needs, while managing everyday family life. These responsibilities, combined with gaps in the system that positioned Mrs Lee into taking on additional responsibilities, highlights the complex background to her SEP decision-making experiences (Harré, 2012).

Like Mrs Lee, parents in Tissot's (2011) study found the process of obtaining provision as time consuming and bureaucratic, suggesting the problems lay with the system. Also like Mrs Lee, parents in Tissot's (2011) research got the school of their choice, but they were still negative of their experience, which the authors suggest could be related to the difficulty of agreeing suitable provision with the LA. Although Tissot (2011) does not state whether parents in their study had a limited choice of schools, which could have contributed towards their negative experience. Mrs Lee reflected on this point about limited choice of schools by saying the decision-making process felt like choosing the “least-worst option”.

The idea of parental experience of the EHCP process was explored in Adams et al's (2017) study, which created a list of factors that were strongly associated with a positive experience. Using these factors in relation to Mrs Lee's negative experience of the process, she experienced; an unreasonable amount of time and work; did not find it easy to be heard or involved in the process; family needs and circumstances were not taken into account; did not find it easy to agree the needs and support described in the EHCP; experienced staff who were not knowledgeable most or all the time; services did not work together all of the time. Mrs Lee's negative experience of the EHCP process not only reveals further gaps in the system, but highlights the lack of duties performed by those within the system, positioning Mrs Lee into additional roles of responsibility to ensure her son's needs were understood and stated within the EHCP (Harré, 2012).

5.5.4. Pushy parent.

The narrative identity of a pushy parent was revealed in the analysis of this research. Mrs Lee narrative suggests she felt positioned, to ensure her son's needs were met, as a result of a lack of responsibility and completion of expected duties from those within the system (Harré, 2012; Hiles et al., 2009).

Mrs Lee talked about how the system can label parents of children with SEN as pushy parents, who seem to always want more, when really all they want is their child's needs met. Findings from the literature suggests parents often have to fight and battle with the system, rather than just engage with it, to secure provision and support (Adams et al., 2017; Skipp & Hopwood, 2006; Tissot, 2011; Truss, 2008). Sales and Vincent (2018) found that parents had to have knowledge of the system, time to engage in the process, financial means and be proactive to ensure they could engage with the EHCP process and secure suitable provision. Skipp and Hopwood (2006) found that some parents needed to lead the whole EHCP process, and manage the professionals involved, to enable progress. These additional responsibilities highlight the pressure that can be placed on parents to have the will, and ability, to engage in the process; ensuring they are allocated suitable provision, in a potentially unbalanced system that can exclude some parents from the process (Sales & Vincent, 2018). The analysis of Mrs Lee's narrative suggests she takes ownership of the label pushy parent and redefines it as a positive and essential part of her narrative identity to ensure her son's needs are met through her choice of suitable SEP (Harré, 2012; Hiles et al., 2009).

5.6. Discussion of Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative

5.6.1. Introduction.

The analysis of Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative raised three areas; being listened to and heard, which was further explored through the role of the EHCP; professionals and diagnoses; the narrative identity of relationships and parental inclusion. These areas will now be discussed with links to previous research. The discussion will start with Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative identity of relationships and parental inclusion due to its importance and ability to provide context to other areas of their narrative.

Referring back to the research question, it is interesting to note that Mr and Mrs Bing did not often talk directly about their SEP decision-making, but did talk about aspects of their

experience that had an effect on their experience. Potentially as a result of Daniel's specific and high level of need, Mr and Mrs Bing talk about wider systemic aspects that played a role in their experience of SEP decision-making.

5.6.2. Parental inclusion and relationships.

The narrative identity of parental inclusion was identified in the analysis. The concept of parental inclusion used in this research refers to factors positioning Mr and Mrs Bing, either by limiting or encouraging, their engagement with aspects of the system during their experience of the SEP decision-making process (Harré, 2012). Mr and Mrs Bing raised aspects like being listened to, being understood and being engaged as important parts of their SEP decision-making experience.

Throughout the interview process, Mr and Mrs Bing seemed to reflect what they had found valuable about the SEP their son attended, at the time of the interview. Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative frequently mentions how relationships affected their inclusion in a range of processes, including their experience of SEP decision-making. Mr and Mrs Bing talk about their current positive relationships with school staff, and contrast these with past experiences, providing their current thinking about what aspects of SEP would matter to them now if they had to choose.

The literature on parental inclusion and engagement is sparse, lacking large detailed studies, and excluding hard to reach groups; mostly consisting of small descriptive studies, that focus on mother who are white and able-bodied (Katz, La Placa, & Hunter, 2007). Factors affecting parental inclusion can involve personal factors, like a lack of parental interest or knowledge of the system, but the majority of barriers to inclusion are not of parental making (Katz et al., 2007). Mr and Mrs Bing acknowledge how confusing the SEN system can be, but also showed an interest and ability to engage in the process, which suggests alternative reasons

affecting their inclusion. This research will now discuss the two areas raised in the analysis related to Mr and Mrs Bing's inclusion; being listened to and heard; professionals and diagnoses.

5.6.3. Being listened to and heard.

The idea of Mr and Mrs Bing being listened to and heard threaded through their narrative. Mr and Mrs Bing expressed their initial sense of having something valuable to contribute in order to create a shared understanding of their son. Despite this, Mr and Mrs Bing frequently experienced a system that did not value their voice. Mr and Mrs Bing mentioned how they were ignored, contradicted, overlooked and overruled by those in the system; creating a sense of being heard, but not listened to.

Listening is the process of not just hearing a person, but also taking in a range of other aspects of communication (Egan, 2017). There are different forms of listening, but the idea of empathic listening seems most relevant to Mr and Mrs Bing's experience. Empathic listening is driven by empathy and involves attending, observing and listening to the speaker. The listener must put their own concerns aside, and be fully present with the speaker, to enable a deeper understanding of stories and narratives being told (Egan, 2017). Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative suggests they currently experience this at their son's school, but this has not always been the case, especially during their SEP decision-making experience.

The CoP takes a family-centred approach that encourages meaningful parent participation in the decisions that affect them and their child (Department for Education, 2015). Although Mr and Mrs Bing did not always feel at the centre of decision, the arrival of the EHCP seemed to affect their experience of meaningful participation.

Parent views on the EHCP process in the research literature is limited. Sales and Vincent (2018) found a mixed picture in regards to parental involvement in the EHCP

assessment and decision-making process. Sales and Vincent's (2018) study highlighted that some parents felt included in the process, while others did not. This result might have been affected by the small sample size in the study or by the fact that it was conducted soon after the implementation of the CoP. In addition, concerns about the lack of clarity and regional variation when implementing the CoP might have also influenced the research as all participants came from one LA (Curran et al., 2017; Hellowell, 2017).

A turning point in Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative around being listened to and heard is related to the EHCP. Mr and Mrs Bing express their surprise when people did start listening to them as a result of being backed-up by the EHCP. Despite this enhanced experience of being listened to, Mr and Mrs Bing wondered if their voice was truly being listened to, or if they were just being heard because of the EHCP. If Mr and Mrs Bing were only being heard due to the EHCP, this could lack the empathic listening required to help them feel included in the process (Egan, 2017).

Professionals in Sales and Vincent's (2018) study all expressed a strong commitment to parental inclusion, yet they also highlighted that individual professional attitudes could affect this approach. Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative suggests they experienced a variation in practice that did not always include them, which could be linked to individual professional attitudes and their interpretation of the CoP (Curran et al., 2017; Hellowell, 2017). Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative provided an example of a negative experience with a professional, that has links to inclusion and being listened to, which will now be discussed.

5.6.4. Professionals and diagnoses.

Throughout their son's life, Mr and Mrs Bing have worked with a wide range of professionals and gained diagnoses to help understand and support their son. Mr and Mrs Bing's experience with professionals and diagnoses could be discussed using a wide range of

literature, including, the power of professionals, paternalism and the power of diagnoses. Despite these all potentially having a role to play in Mr and Mrs Bing's SEP decision-making experience, none of these seem to reflect their narrative. As an alternative, this research will use the idea of non-finite loss to explore Mr and Mrs Bing's experience of professionals and diagnoses (Bruce & Schultz, 2004).

Non-finite loss is an enduring loss that is preceded by a negative life event (e.g. a diagnosis, a breakdown in a relationship), that retains a physical and/or psychological presence (Bruce & Schultz, 2004). Based on individual personalities and the situation, the presence of a traumatic event can create a sense of loss, that can be ongoing and vary in intensity. Linked with the idea of loss is the need to grieve, which involves a state of acute anxiety, combined with a period of searching and yearning for what has been lost (Bruce & Schultz, 2004). In the context of non-finite loss, this ongoing search can have an indefinable effect on an individual's life; with the continued presence of physical, psychological and emotional effects.

Bruce, Schultz and Smyrnios (1996) conducted a longitudinal study involving parents of children with severe disabilities. A range of insights were produced from the study, but generally speaking, they highlight how parents of children with a disability experience an ongoing sense of grief following the disruption of a significant attachment; which can be to a person, a place or a thing (Bruce et al., 1996).

Mr and Mrs Bing's first experience with the paediatrician involved him displaying poor listening skills, dismissing their thoughts about a diagnosis and questioning their ability as parents. Mr and Mrs Bing describe this experience as traumatic, stating that it was a big step for them to seek help. The paediatrician's use of words, and how they were delivered, seemed to be a significant component of Mr and Mrs Bing's traumatic experience (Bruce & Schultz, 2001). The paediatrician provided no validation for the parent's concerns, and no explanation

for his reasoning outside blaming them, leaving them with questions about their own sense of self as a parent (Harré, 2012). Mr and Mrs Bing acknowledge this early experience with a professional left a long-lasting impression on them, suggesting it was a traumatic event and a potential experience of loss that formed part of their SEP decision-making experience.

This interaction with the paediatrician resulted in a range of emotions, feelings and consequences for Mr and Mrs Bing. Trying to process information when traumatised can be an arduous and constricted process (Bruce & Schultz, 2002). Mr and Mrs Bing expressed feelings that could be associated with an experience of non-finite loss; feelings of being confused, judged, emotionally confronted and out of control (Bruce & Schultz, 2004).

Immediately after this traumatic experience, Mr and Mrs Bing were unable to gain any support from within the system, leaving them alone to process their loss and grief (Bruce & Schultz, 2004). Mr and Mrs Bing's experience of a lack of support is reflected in the literature, with Truss (2008) suggesting there are no mechanisms to emotionally support parents of children with SEN.

A year later, the same paediatrician was supportive of Mr and Mrs Bing, eventually leading to a range of diagnoses, including an informal diagnosis of attachment difficulties. This development in Mr and Mrs Bing's experience could highlight three forms of non-finite loss (Bruce & Schultz, 2002). The first being a loss in trust of professional judgement through the changing and variable nature of their opinions and their practice. Mr and Mrs Bing go on to acknowledge this variability in practice, stating that they do not know a professional who views attachment the same. The second is a loss of their son as they previously knew him and a need to accept him for who is now. Mr and Mrs Bing seem to acknowledge this process of acceptance when talking about everyone wanting a "normal child". The third loss is related to the social understanding of attachment difficulties and its impact on parental identity. Mr and Mrs Bing

mention how they feel blamed by other people for their son's attachment difficulties. This sense of blame seems to be internalised, repositioning them, and changing their sense of self as parents (Harré, 2012).

Viewing Mr and Mrs Bing's narrative using the perspective of loss and grief highlights some of the emotional experiences they went through over many years, that affected their experience of SEP decision-making.

5.7. Discussion of Mr Blake's narrative

5.7.1. Introduction.

The analysis of Mr Blake's narrative first raised the idea of taking a business approach to the SEP decision-making process. Next, the analysis highlighted the role of emotion in Mr Blake's narrative, which is explored further through the narrative identity of dissonance. These aspects of Mr Blake's narrative will now be discussed and linked to existing research.

5.7.2. A business approach.

Mr Blake's narrative highlights how his previous roles in business influenced his approach and experience of the SEP decision-making process. Mr Blake positions himself as someone who likes to make decisions through a rational process and use factual information. Within research, this is known as the influence-on metaphor, where decisions are a non-emotional and a solely cognitive process (Peters, Västfjäll, Gärling, & Slovic, 2006).

Mr Blake believes that by taking an objective perspective of the system and his boys' needs, he was able to identify the key aspects of the process that helped his SEP decision-making process. Although Mr Blake's approach to SEP decision-making may reflect aspects of masculinity, and not just a business approach, with links to the ideas of rational and professional parenting (Widding, 2014). In contrast, femininity has been linked with the role of emotion in parenting, which will be explored later in this discussion.

Mr Blake's business approach to SEP decision-making can be linked to the marketisation of education raised in Mr and Mrs Jack's narrative. The quasi-market of educational provision, and the business-like agenda of the CoP, created an environment that could have suited Mr Blake's business approach to SEP decision-making (Institute for Education, 2012; Lehane, 2017; Pratt, 2016). Mr Blake's years of experience in business seemed to have prepared him to operate within the SEN system and achieve what he set out to do, decide what SEP provision he wanted for his boys and gain them a place.

Mr Blake extends his business approach to his view of the SEN system, describing it as a business that has to balance the books. This view of the SEN system is in contrast to much of the literature, which often discusses the impact of budgetary constraints on provision and relating them to aspects of practice like social justice (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Curran et al., 2017; Hellawell, 2019; Palikara et al., 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018).

Mr Blake's perspective of the SEN system as a business seems more in line with a distributive justice perspective of ensuring limited resources are fairly distributed across all those in need (Fox et al., 2007). In contrast to the literature, Mr Blake's framing allowed him to view the SEN system in a positive light and work within its constraints (Entman, 1993). Although this framing might not only be influenced by his business approach, but also his role as a foster parent.

Related to Mr Blake's role as a foster parent, Sales and Vincent's (2018) study found the majority of professionals believed that treatment for "high profile" cases, such as CYP in care, were likely to receive greater support. As children in care are the legal responsibility of the LA, Mr Blake may have received additional support, which could have had a positive effect on his experience of the SEP decision-making process.

One method Mr Blake learnt in business, which he used to achieve his goal of gaining an EHCP and provision, was to apply pressure to the system. Mr Blake mentions how he identified those in the system who had influence on decisions and applied pressure to them through persistent contact. Research by Truss (2008) anecdotally supports the idea that parents who make a fuss are more likely to secure resources for their child. In addition, the literature also highlights a range of other skills that Mr Blake had, which could have improved his ability to advocate for his boys and gain his choice of SEP. These skills could include his ability to understand the system, his confidence and communication skills, his access to financial resources and the time he could dedicate to the process (Sales & Vincent, 2018).

5.7.3. The role of emotion.

Despite Mr Blake's claim of taking an objective approach, the plotline of emotion and the role it played during his experience of the SEP decision-making process was identified throughout his narrative.

Mr Blake summarises his thoughts by saying, as a foster parent, he feels about 20% emotionally involved when compared to biological parents. In contrast to this claim, Mr Blake also mentions how he loves the boys and considers them as part of the family. This contrast in language seems to highlight a feeling of tension, related to emotions, within Mr Blake's narrative. Mr Blake's efforts to control his emotions is ongoing throughout the narrative, stating that letting his emotions take-over would not only be a "nightmare", but could also result in him "failing" the boys. Further acknowledgement of this tension, and the need for an emotional release, is highlighted through Mr Blake's attendance at a foster parent support group.

Mr Blake's belief around the rationality of decision-making, and his frequent emotional experiences that affected his perception and objectivity, seem to reposition him throughout his narrative (Harré, 2012). These frequent shifts in position lead to the creation of Mr Blake's

narrative identity of dissonance (Hiles et al., 2009). The theory of cognitive dissonance refers to a person holding two opposing attitudes, views or beliefs at the same time, which can cause discomfort (Festinger, 1962).

Research into cognitive dissonance theory has highlighted the influence it can have over a wide range of judgements and decisions (e.g. Plous, 1993). For Mr Blake, he seemed to experience dissonance about the role of emotion and its negative effects on his objective thinking process. This disparity between his belief in objectivity and his experience of emotions, creates a lack of internal consistency in his beliefs and behaviours, which generates dissonance (Festinger, 1962).

Throughout the narrative, Mr Blake seemed to try and overcome this dissonance by denying his emotions and reaffirming his belief in the influence-on metaphor. This strategy aims to reduce Mr Blake's discomfort and focus on his non-emotional and objective goal of achieving a suitable SEP for his boys. Although Mr Blake's strategy of denial seems to have limited success as he continues to experience emotional thoughts during the SEP decision-making process, as highlighted throughout his narrative.

An alternative method of overcoming dissonance is to try and make the opposing attitudes, views, or beliefs, more consistent with each other (Festinger, 1962). One potential way of creating more consistent beliefs for Mr Blake is through learning about the beneficial role of emotions in decision-making.

Emotions and affect in decision-making has received widespread attention in the literature, performing a wide range of potential functions (e.g. Blanchette & Richards, 2010). To help explore the role of emotion in Mr Blake's decision-making, Pfister and Bohm's (2008) framework will be used. Pfister and Bohm's (2008) framework highlights four emotional functions in decision-making, including; providing information, both positive and negative,

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during considerations by the decision-maker to evaluate choice; providing the ability to improve decision speed; allowing the assessment of relevance regarding specific elements of the decision-making process; allowing commitment to certain decisions, based on social and moral aspects, rather than just self-interest.

Using Pfister and Bohm's (2008) framework, Mr Blake's may have used emotional information to help assess and decide what aspects of SEP were important to consider during his goal driven process. For example, Mr Blake's underlying love and knowledge of his boys, combined with his fear of failing them, could have helped inform his goal driven decision-making process. Mr Blake also provides a direct example in his narrative of how emotions helped him to assess and commit to a decision. Mr Blake considers how his decisions to secure a provision place for his boys might affect other parents of children with SEN. This consideration highlights that Mr Blake used emotions, during his SEP decision-making process, to think about the social and moral aspects that helped inform his final choice.

5.8. Evaluating qualitative research

Applying traditional methods of evaluating research through concepts like reliability and validity contradict the very nature of narrative research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). As an alternative, the characteristics of good qualitative research, as outlined by Yardley (2000), will be used to explore the trustworthiness of this research.

This research showed sensitivity to context through the value it placed on parent voice, the ontological and epistemological positions taken, the NI methods of collecting data and the abductive process of analysis. Further consideration for the participants' perspective during the analysis was achieved through member checking. The researcher also aimed to reduce their influence at each stage of the process within the current research, although the researcher still acknowledges the existence of a power imbalance with the informants.

Commitment and rigour of this research is highlighted through aspects like the researcher's account of previous working with parents, the non-interrupted accounts from parents during the interview, the full transcription of all interviews by the researcher and the multiple levels of analysis applied to the data.

This research has looked to increase transparency by documenting as many stages of the research as possible and by acknowledging the role of the researcher through reflexivity. Coherence of this research is highlighted through the process and documentation of the analysis, findings and discussion; that looked to avoid over-interpretation, and was tentatively placed into context of existing literature. The impact and importance of the research will be outlined in a subsequent section.

5.9. Member checking

As part of conducting good qualitative research, and showing sensitivity to context, member checking was conducted. The researcher originally intended to offer informants a second meeting, with an opportunity to review their transcript and discuss the analysis, as part of the joint construction of meaning. This was not possible due to the social restrictions in place at time of this research, so the decision was made to contact all informants by phone and offer to verbally discuss the analysis. All informants accepted this offer and agreed with the research findings of their narrative. It is interesting to note two experiences that occurred during member checking, which will now be explored.

During member checking of the analysis with Mr Blake, finding around the role of emotions and dissonance in his decision-making were discussed. Mr Blake stated that, although he was not aware of the role emotions could have played in his decision-making, he acknowledged that it may have unconsciously affected his process. This new knowledge about

the potentially positive role emotions can play in decision-making may help reduce Mr Blake's experience of dissonance in the future.

The second experience during member checking was Mrs Jack's response to the narrative identity of them-and-us. Although Mrs Jack acknowledged this analysis of their story, she was also uncomfortable with the potential implications of the label. Further discussion allowed the researcher to highlight it was a reflection of how Mr and Mrs Jack were positioned into this role to ensure their son's needs were met through their chosen SEP. The narrative identity emerged from the analysis and highlighted the uncomfortable position these parents were placed in during their experience of SEP decision-making. On reflection, the researcher recognised that the narrative identity might be considered by Mrs Jack as a form of positioning, repeating an uncomfortable feeling experienced during the process of SEP decision-making. This was not the intention of the researcher, who wanted to reveal their truth of the SEP decision-making experience. The researcher also acknowledged that conducting member checking by phone may not have been the most appropriate method to discuss such detailed and sensitive content.

5.10. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of the researcher engaging in explicit and self-aware analysis of their own role in the research (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity acknowledges how the relationship between the researcher and the informants can influence the research findings, and aims to create a co-constituted account of the topic under investigation (Finlay, 2002). Developing intersubjective awareness through reflexivity can help situate the researcher, while increasing understanding of the topic under investigation (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

One source of reflexivity is through introspection of one's own experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As raised in the introduction, the researcher's interest in the topic of

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parental decision-making started when working in a role that provided first-hand experience of this process. These experiences may have affected the intersubjectivity between the researcher and the informants by identifying with their vulnerability. Although this may have introduced some bias towards the informants, it also motivated the researcher to be present during the interviews and attentively listen to them, striving towards a detailed and honest account of their direct experience.

Another area reflected on within this research was the method of data collection. The researcher hoped to reduce their influence on the research through the use of NI, creating space for informants to provide their own account of experiences related to SEP decision-making (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). As a potential consequence of this space, all informants expressed some concern about the information they provided during the interview. Concerns included, asking what else did the researcher want to know, stating that they were not providing enough information and asking if what they were saying is what the researcher wanted to hear. These concerns have been raised in the literature as part of the NI method, where the interviewer poses as naïve person, who knows little about the story being told (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Informants in the study may have assumed the researcher knew something about SEP decision making and might have a hidden agenda. This could lead to informants hypothesising about what the researcher wants to hear. As a result, part of each informant's narrative is likely to include some strategic communication to either please the researcher or navigate a complex political context (Crossley, 2009). In those moments, the researcher wanted to reassure the informants but was also conscious of influencing their narrative. The researcher did not think the informants engaged in strategic storytelling, but the full extent of this may remain hidden.

During the analysis of the data and development of the findings, the researcher experienced a certain amount of tension and struggle for a range of different reasons. One of

these reasons was dealing with the large data set, while staying true to the ontological and epistemological stance of this research. This research took a relativist and social constructivist stance with the aim of respecting each narrative account as a whole (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Due to the duration of the interviews and the number of participants, this created pressure on deriving analytic accounts that conformed to the limitations of the research structure, while still being true to each narrative account as a whole. This created a number of conflicts when making decisions about how to document the analysis and findings in the final research paper. Reflecting on this point, the researcher wondered if they had involved too many participants in the research, when originally, they were concerned that they did not have enough. The researcher reduced these concerns by following the NOI process during analysis and through member checking with the informants about the final analysis.

This research has used reflexivity to develop our understanding of intersubjectivity, situate the researcher and develop our understanding of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. Despite these measures to “out” the researcher’s presence, it should be acknowledged that the their influence in this research goes beyond the points raised above (Finlay, 2002).

5.11. Limitations of the current research

The nature of narrative research means the researcher is present within all aspects of this study. A range of choices and decisions made by the researcher will have affected all aspects of this research, including, the area of focus, the research question, methodology design, analysis process, generation of findings and the discussion. The complex and challenging process of analysing data is often quoted as a limitation and can be a threat to validity through interpretation (Squire, 2013; Maxwell, 1992). Although use of the NOI model looked to address these complexities, and increase transparency (Hiles et al., 2017).

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The interviewer in this research held the dual roles of researcher and trainee educational psychologist. Added to this, the researcher was also working for the same LA involved in the informants' SEP decision-making process. These roles combined, potentially created a complex perspective of the researcher, which could have influenced the informants' participation and engagement in the research. The researcher spent time to explain that they were there as a researcher and anonymity was assured, but the fact the researcher held these dual roles, had the potential of influencing the informants' narrative and subsequent analysis through respondent bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another potential limitation of this research is the use of an opt-in policy to participation involving a purposeful sample. This policy respected the autonomy of the participants, but also limited the researcher's ability to influence the demographics of the sample, for example, including hard to reach groups. The opt-in policy also meant that parents needed to be motivated to be included in this research, which may have influenced their narrative.

This research could be criticised for using an interview and analysis method by different authors (Hiles et al., 2009; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The NOI method of analysis used in this research suggests that it is focused on analysing narrative interview data and discusses the use of structured or semi-structured interviews that encourage a narrative mode of expressions (Hiles et al., 2009). Although the NOI authors recognise that there are a wide variety of approaches to narrative research, and encourage learning from them to develop a unique approach (Hiles et al., 2009). The NI method used in this research did encourage a narrative mode of expression, as required by the NOI method, which enabled analysis of the data.

The use of the NI method in this research could be criticised for blurring the boundaries between narrative and semi-structured interviews. Hermanns (1991, as cited in Jovchelovitch

and Bauer, 2000) states NI is a semi-structured interview enhanced by narratives, which potentially goes against the constructivist and participant informed nature of this research. Although questions were created using an informant's language, and the temporal structure of their unbroken narrative was used during the analysis. Despite these mitigating factors, the introduction of questioning could have influenced informant narratives and questions it as a form of narrative methodology.

Central to the narrative approach is temporality of the events presented by informants, which was challenging to uphold in the current research. The nature of the question being asked about SEP decision-making meant informants recalled experiences that occurred over a long period of time, with some going back many years, and included a broad and diverse range of experiences. Ricoeur (1991) suggested that there are two types of time in a told story. The first involves a series of events, like a chronicle. The second is called *emplotment*, which involves composing a story from a series of events; involving aspects of integration, culmination and closure (Ricoeur, 1991). The concept of *emplotment* makes the notion of temporal configuration of narratives an active process, and seems to have applied to the informant narratives in this research; framing SEP decision-making as a combination of memories from the past, current thoughts and considerations of the future (Ricoeur, 1991).

An example of this active process could have been reflected through the interviews involving many "episodes", that crossed over in content and temporality, and required some aspects of *restorying* during the analysis. The changes made to the temporality of the narratives in this research, for analytic purposes, could have affected their unique "order of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1991). These concerns could also be taken further, with some researchers arguing that real-life events do not have a coherent temporal unity and cannot be applied to a narrative structure (Crossley, 2000). Despite these concerns, using narrative methods allowed the informants to express their own experiences of the SEP decision-making process

The current research could be criticised for its lack of depth and spread of information that addresses the research question; with only four interviews conducted, and responses from informants that did not always directly address SEP decision-making. Although these points could be seen as a criticism, the researcher viewed these aspects of the research as a strength. In the absence of previous literature, the current research looked to begin our understanding of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. The current research aimed to do this by providing informants with space to retell their experiences and provide a depth of information from an informed perspective. The design of this research looked to support this aim, from the philosophical stance taken (realist ontology and social constructivist epistemology), to the choice of method and methodology (narrative, narrative interview and narrative oriented inquiry). This approach produced rich narratives with a depth of information, as highlighted through the analysis of interview transcripts for this research (for an example, see appendix J). Parental narratives in this research highlighted the potentially complex nature of their experiences, going beyond influential factors, to include contextual aspects that can affect the SEP decision-making process. This research has revealed narratives that begin our understanding of experiences related to SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. More questions than answers may have been generated by this research, but these questions are based on informed sources; establishing a basis to develop our understanding through future research, while also providing direct accounts of experience that EPs can reflect on and utilise within their professional practice.

5.12. Implications for EP practice

Burnham's (2013) study suggests EPs defined a key part of their role as mediators of useful outcomes, that make a difference to the lives of others, rather than generalisable knowledge. This position is reflected in this research, taking an exploratory approach that did not look to generalise or develop theory, but hopes to make a difference.

One general observation of this research is how informants responded to the question of their experience of SEP decision-making by including a wide range of systemic factors that influenced their experience of the process. The narrative accounts presented in this research provide a detailed insight into four parental experiences of the SEP decision-making process. Acquiring and analysing this level of detail about a single experience is rarely afforded in EP practice. Although it is rare for EPs to be directly involved in SEP decision-making, they so work directly with parents. Revealing these narratives provides an opportunity to learn about, and reflect on these aspects of parental experiences; deciding what they may mean to them, and how it might influence their practice. For example, this research could highlight that the SEP decision-making process is more than just considering a range of factors, and finding suitable provision that can meet need. Narratives in this research suggest a range of considerations that can influence parental experience of the SEP decision-making process, including; the use of language and how it can frame a decision; how parents are exposed to a range of experiences that affect their positioning, identity, sense of self, and construction of meaning. These aspects of parental experience could be seen as universal, influencing many areas of their everyday life. Taking time to explore these aspects with parents could assist EP practice, while potentially providing parents with support during their experience of the SEP decision-making process

Another potential implication for EP practice is the use of narrative methodology in this research. Taking a narrative approach allowed parents to share and explore their experience of SEP decision-making in detail. The use of a narrative approach in this research has links to the use of the consultation model in EP services (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). Consultation involves working collaboratively with others to make a difference through a recursive process that combines exploration, assessment, intervention and review (Wagner, 2000). The use of narrative methods is one way of exploring in consultation. Narratives dominate human

discourse, providing an account of events that involve meaningful interpretation from the perspective of the speaker. These meaningful interpretations can provide insights that can lead to significant change, which is a key focus of the consultation model. There are many aspects of using a narrative method that could be useful for EP practice, but its ability to explore parental identities will now be discussed.

A central part of the NOI method of analysis used in this research is the idea of identity positions and narrative identity (Hiles et al., 2009). Through each parent's narrative, multiple positions have been revealed in relation to their complex experience of SEP decision-making. These positions not only uncover each parent's perspective about associated rights and duties, but they can also reveal aspects of their beliefs and values (Harré, 2012). The NOI method of analysis involving identity positioning shares some similarities with the theory of personal construct psychology (PCP). PCP is a theory that underlies many models used in EP practice and suggests people are proactive in making sense of themselves and the world they inhabit; constructing meaning from their own experience, which is unique to each individual (Kelly, 1955). The parents in this study revealed a broad range of positions they experienced during the SEP decision-making process, each contributing to their meaning constructs and identity. Exploring parental experiences of SEP decision-making over time revealed an evolution of positions, constructs and identities. Revealing these evolutions could further our understanding around the development of parental identity over time, and place their current positioning into context. These additional insights could also help inform collaborative work between EPs and parents, while increasing opportunities to make a difference through the consultation process. EPs often have a wide range of competing priorities, which can sometimes result in a reduced amount of time to explore parental experiences. This research hopes to demonstrate the potential benefits of using narrative methods in EP practice to conduct meaningful conversations with parents that make a difference (Wagner, 2000).

5.13. Future research

This research, and its potential implications for practice, will be presented at a university and within a LA at an EP team meeting. The researcher will ask for feedback about the presentation, and about the implications for EP practice. Any suggested changes to practice, that are made as a result of the presentations, could become the focus for future research.

The literature search conducted for this study revealed that the voice of some key people involved in the EHCP process were underrepresented. The absence of parental voice in the literature suggests future research focusing on their involvement in the EHCP process could develop our understand, and reveal further insights. The relative absence of EHCP coordinators in the literature, and their central role in the process, also suggests their involvement in future research could develop our understanding of the process. Considering how EHCP coordinators are a central point of contact during the EHCP process, and are potentially influenced by a wide range of systemic factors, the use of positioning theory could reveal some interesting insights about their role.

The researcher believes that using loss and grief to analyse parent narratives provided an interesting perspective on their experiences that is underrepresented in the literature. Future research could use grief and loss to explore a range of parent experiences, including, the experience of parents who are not allocated their preferred provision, which could further develop our understanding of the SEP decision-making experience.

Existing research into SEP decision-making mostly focused on factors that could influence the process. This research focused on the overall experience, adding context to our understanding of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. Future research could look to explore different experiences of decision-making within an educational context, such as selecting a subject to study at school, or the decision to go onto further education.

5.14. Conclusion

This research has aimed to explore the experience of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP. Promoting parent voice and autonomy through placing them at the centre of SEP decision-making is outlined in legislation and promoted as an expected practice. The transition from primary to secondary school was selected as a significant point in CYPs development and a time when parents consider different forms of educational provision.

A scoping search of the literature, conducted under previous versions of the CoP, highlighted a range of factors that could influence parent SEP decision-making. The literature review conducted for this research revealed a range of views and experience, mostly from professionals and SENCo, about the implementation of the CoP and EHCPs. The changes brought in by the CoP were mostly welcomed, but a range of concerns were expressed, including practical aspects of implementation. A key concern raised was the lack of guidance provided by the CoP on how to implement the directed changes, which could have contributed towards the observed variations in professional practice. Although the majority of the research in the literature review was conducted shortly after the introduction of the CoP, and may reflect the early stages of policy implementation rather than a long-term issue.

In line with the social constructivist stance taken in this research, and its exploratory nature, a single research question was developed: “what narratives do parents of children with an EHCP provide when asked about their experience of the decision-making process of SEP?”.

The open and exploratory nature of the research question placed the parents’ voice at the centre, striving to ensure that their “truth” would be listened to and heard. Narrative methodology was selected to explore the experiences of parents of CYP with SEN and their SEP decision-making experience. This provided parents with the autonomy to express their subjective meaning of experiences related to SEP decision-making; revealing the content of

their experiences, factors that influenced their decision, their positioning and how they constructed their experience through their retelling.

Based on the social constructivist stance of this research, parental narratives were analysed and discussed separately, treating them as unique and subjective experiences related to SEP decision-making. The analysis of the parent narratives produced a wide range of experiences and insights about SEP decision-making based on their own subjective meaning. No attempts were made to generalise or compare the analysis of the parent narratives, in line with the social constructivist stance taken in this research. This research was placed into context through the creation of some tentative links between existing literature and the analysis of each interview.

The researcher acknowledged their presence and influence on the current research. This research aimed to “out” the researcher by revealing previous experiences related to the research, and through ongoing reflexivity throughout the study.

This research was conducted by a trainee EP and has potential implications for practice. This research adopted an approach that did not look to generalise, but wanted to make a difference, reflecting core EP values. In addition, the use of narrative methodology and valuing parent voice, reflects the practices that some EPs use in their daily work, like consultation and PCP methods. By exploring the experience of SEP decision-making by parents of CYP with an EHCP, it is hoped that this research will help EPs to reflect on these narratives; considering what these parental experiences mean to them, and how they might affect their practice.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Appendix A – Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature review

7.1.1. Inclusion criteria for the literature search:

- Published between 2014-2019, due to the introduction of legislation in 2014
- Published in a peer reviewed journal

7.1.2. Exclusion criteria for the literature search;

- Research conducted or published before the introduction of the 2014 legislation
- Non peer reviewed research papers
- Research that did not include accounts of direct experience from parents or professionals about the new CoP or the EHCP process.

7.2. Definition of professionals for the literature search

For the purpose of this literature search, “professionals” were defined as people in roles that work directly with CYP. Examples of professionals included are:

- Headteachers
- SENCos
- Teachers
- Specialist teachers
- Teaching assistants
- SEND coordinators or SEND caseworkers
- SEND consultants
- Educational psychologists
- Speech and language therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Doctors (e.g. pediatricians, psychiatrists, general practitioners)

7.3. Appendix B – Descriptive overview of research papers included in the literature review

Study title Year Author(s) Journal	Research purpose/aims	Participants	Design and methodology	Main Findings	Critical appraisal using the CASP framework
<p>Professionals' views on the new policy for special educational needs in England: ideology versus implementation (2019).</p> <p>Palikara, O. Castro, S. Gaona, C. Eirinaki, V.</p> <p>European Journal of Special Needs Education</p>	<p>Capture professional's views about the new policy for special educational needs</p>	<p>349 professionals</p>	<p>Mixed method online survey – rating scales and Semi structured</p> <p>One way-ANOVA</p> <p>Inductive thematic analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionals agreed in principle with some of the changes Highlighted some key restrictions to achieving the new policy's goals (e.g. tight deadlines, budget cuts, challenges when trying to collaborate with other professionals, and fragmented implementation of the policy) EPs and SENCOs significantly disagreed on; age extension to 25 years old; on how well needs are described; on professional requirements of the process. hiatus between ideology and service provision that is affecting its implementation Clearer guidelines needed; systematic training and professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants from researcher "contacts"- no further details Low response rate to research invitation – 10% No explicit discussion of method used 89% of participants were female/ 73% were EPs and SENCOs sample bias 72% from London and south east – geographic bias/generalisability No modifications mentioned as a result of pilot study Survey took 15-20minutes – limited for semi-structure No mention of how semi-structure views were collected – open text box? No mention of how data was handled or stored Questions based on existing literature -possibly from previous CoP Ethical board approval – no further details No before and after care mentioned No mention of question bias

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					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative data used most in analysis; qualitative data used in discussion No mention of how many raters used during thematic analysis No discussion of future areas for research
<p>'Forget the Health and Care and just call them Education Plans': SENCOs' perspectives on Education, Health and Care plans (2018).</p> <p>Boesley, L., Crane, L.</p> <p>Journal of research in Special Educational Needs, vol 18, number 1, 36-47</p>	To reveal SENCOs perspectives on the effectiveness of the process when applying and transferring to an EHCP	16 SENCOs	<p>Semi structured interviews</p> <p>Thematic analysis</p>	<p>Three key themes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the perceived role of the SENCO in the EHC plan process; Evolving procedural changes and challenges Difficulty in accessing an EHCP for CYP with social, emotional and mental health needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little mention of family involvement in process – except managing expectations Perceptions mostly negatively focused Vague and unstated sources of participant recruitment – contacting schools, online channels Questions developed using existing literature, most of which was before new CoP Limited specific detail of analysis process No acknowledgement of researcher presence in the research
<p>Developing an Individualised Assessment for KS1 & 2 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (2018).</p> <p>Stelmaszczyk, K.</p> <p>Support for learning, volume 33, number 3, 241-254</p>	To describe the journey of developing an assessment system that can capture and track progress of outcomes as outlined in an EHCP	1 senior team leader for a single special educational needs' primary school	Self-narrative account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> created an assessment regime that aimed to capture and track CYP progress of short and long-term outcomes as outlined in EHCPs. The school developed a whole school, whole-curriculum approach to assessment that aimed to make an innovative contribution to individualised learning 89%-94% of pupils achieved or exceeded outcome expectations Clear indicator to teachers around CYP aspirations to focus learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher reflects on own experience and some on teachers and parents using the system, but not wider at those affected by the new system Lack of study design, more of a reflection on the process after the fact No mention of ethical issues mentioned or addressed Findings and analysis are hard to judge as specific detail on outcome focus and achievement are not

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved monitoring of pupil progress Greater understanding of strengths and weaknesses Help day-to-day planning Improve parent visibility of CYP progress 	<p>detailed, with no previous baselines for comparison</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single specialist school account where all students have an EHCP – no talk of transferring findings Lack of placing research into literature context - referencing only DfE No areas for future research, only what the school will do in the future
<p>Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives (2018).</p> <p>Sales, N. Vincent, K.</p> <p>British Journal of Special Education NASEN vol 45, number 1, 62-80</p>	<p>To explore the extent the legislation reforms have addressed shortcomings of the former statementing process</p>	<p>15 individuals in total (2 parents, 2 independent parent support workers, 1 SENCo, 4 young people, 2 social workers, 2 educational psychologists and 2 medical professionals from 2 local authorities</p>	<p>In-depth semi-structured interviews</p> <p>Questionnaire – for CYP not focused on in this review</p> <p>Focus group</p> <p>Thematic analysis</p>	<p>Results suggest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes and provision not always clearly identified or expressed EHCs have improved parental involvement in the process and has become more person-centred in its approach, Concerns were raised about the consistency when interpreting and applying legislation and in professional practices are needed to achieve the aims of the new system. Multiagency working – linked with parent satisfaction Time constraints and work pressures linked to inconsistent experience Support for age extension up to 25, post-16 education not always equipped for CYP with SEND 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants contacted through parent partnership – engaged and aware of support sources – excluded other groups, representative? Small sample Participants had experiences previous statement of SEN system, not new applicants Brief outline of interviews and focus groups Question focus mentioned, but not what they were and how they were developed No mention of modification to methods Model only part of the analysis process mentioned – no mention of additional raters No mention of the researcher's own role or the relationship with participants Hard to tell if rigorously analysed

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Study title/Year/Author(s)/ Journal	Research purpose/aims	Participants	Design and methodology	Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical appraisal using the CASP framework
<p>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms 2014: SENCos' perspectives of the first six month (2017).</p> <p>Helen Curran, Tilly Mortimore and Richard Riddell. British Journal of Special education. Vol 44 number 1</p>	<p>Exploring the experiences of SENCos as policy actors for the SEND Code of Practice</p> <p>study focuses on:</p> <p>The nature of support SENCos received,</p> <p>Changes they had made to their settings in response and enablers, barriers to the process of policy implementation.</p>	<p>74 SENCo</p> <p>2/3 from primary settings</p>	<p>Paper part of a larger PhD research project, taking a 5-phase approach. This paper focused on the 4th phase</p> <p>Questionnaire – semi structured – mixed open and closed questions</p> <p>not all parts of the questionnaire are reported in this study due to the large and diverse nature of the questions</p>	<p>The themes generated include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> bureaucratic work access to support from local authority although this varied and lacked clarity reduced SEN register confusion over application of the term SEN better communication and co-production with parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small sample, although compared to similar research Questionnaire not detailed in full, only specific aspects – selective data, reflective/bias? Unsure how questionnaire was administered 53% of participants from email and LA contact 51% participants from south west – LA pathfinder area influence on the sample Questions based on themes from previous phases, some questions mentioned in relation to figures, but no explicit list Type of analysis applied to data not addressed and process not described Researchers do not address own role No mention of ethical considerations, might be in earlier phases
<p>'The SEND Code of Practice has given me clout': a phenomenological study illustrating how SENCos managed the introduction of the SEND reforms (2019)</p> <p>Curran, H</p> <p>British Journal of Special education. Vol 46 number 1</p>	<p>Exploring the experiences of SENCos as policy actors for the SEND Code of Practice</p> <p>Specifically exploring:</p>	<p>9 SENCos</p>	<p>Paper part of a larger PhD research project, taking a 5-phase approach. This paper focused on the 3rd phase</p> <p>In-depth semi structured interviews with SENCos –</p>	<p>The study concludes that SENCo assume a number of policy actor roles concurrently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SENCos took the lead narrating role when selecting, determining, interpreting and implementing the new policy Potentially influencing wider SEND priorities, regardless of experience, seniority, support or guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most SENCo in sample had around 1 years' experience – representative? Few details on how participants were recruited or why they took part Pilot study conducted, but no mention of adjustments Study does not mention how data was captured, but mentions it was transcribed

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	<p>reflections on the SENCo role</p> <p>SENCo activities undertaken across the year</p> <p>how SENCos facilitated the implementation of the 2015 Code</p>		<p>conducted by telephone</p> <p>Phenomenological approach</p> <p>Uses Ball et al. 2012 policy actor typology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCos lead in the absence of traditional forms of leadership • generated feelings of being undervalued, lacking support and status. • SENCos were often not joining the senior leadership team, this was not seen as a significant barrier. • Feelings of responsibility towards children and parents that extended beyond the traditional role • solitary nature of the role a concern. • Potential barrier of experience and confidence in the role and policy implementation, added to the lack of specific guidance. • new statutory guidance provided the "clout" to bring about change and opportunity; creating strategic potential not previously available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous phases informed questions but no further details provided • Ethical considerations are not mentioned • Number of raters not mentioned • No link or suggestion of future research – possibly due to multiple phases of research
<p>A review of parent-professional partnerships and some new obligations and concerns arising from the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice 2015 (2017)</p> <p>Hellawell, B.</p> <p>British Journal of Special Education (NASEN) Vol 44, number 4</p>	<p>Focus for this review on the second part of the paper where aspects of an empirical project were explored</p> <p>Exploring early experiences of professionals working under the new code of practice</p>	<p>16 professionals including SENCos, SEND caseworkers, advisors and commissioners, social workers, child psychiatrists</p>	<p>Single, in-depth, Semi structured interviews</p> <p>Data used in the study has been selected from a project that aimed to listen and learn about the early experiences of SEND professionals</p>	<p>Results revealed views around;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater empowerment and involvement of parents • Expectations of parents to follow a script and questioning empowerment • Parental responsibility to exercise personal judgements and working collaboratively during the process • Professional engineering of parental compliance and portray it as empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants recruited initially from personal contacts, then using snowballing • Locality of participants not mentioned, only that they were from 4 LAs • Details of how the interviews were conducted are not provided • No details on how data was collected, handled or stored • No details provided about how questions were generated • Selective data used from an existing project and used in another study by the author

Parental narratives around decision-making

	<p>Specifically looks at:</p> <p>the challenges and opportunities of the parent-professional partnership.</p> <p>The question of what new obligations and ethical effects on partnerships with parents have emerged from the Code for practicing professionals.</p>		collaborating under the new Code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral principle of autonomy suggesting parents have a right to know and choose • Concern and powerlessness of professions when working with parents who do not want to engage in the process or cannot due to personal circumstances • Freedom, flexibility and opportunities for professionals to develop their own practices within the Code and in the best interests of the child • Increase opportunity for conflict created by the code – additional tools might be needed • Focus on outcomes means professional managing moral imperatives of both child-centredness and co-production • Concerns around the parent-professional partnership when discussing the complexity of cases and choices, especially in light of the difference between parents and where they are on their journey • Issues around parental thoughts and skills to establish long-term outcomes • Development of tools professionals use to involve parents and help established long-term goals through co-production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research mostly focuses on generalisations and not contradictory evidence • The researcher does not mention their own role in the research
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Parental narratives around decision-making

Study title/Year/Author(s)/ Journal	Research purpose/aims	Participants	Design and methodology	Main Findings	Critical appraisal using the CASP framework
<p>An ethical audit of the SEND CoP 2015: professional partnership working and the division of ethical labour</p> <p>Hellawell, B</p> <p>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 19(1), 15–26</p>	<p>Address ethical challenges encountered by professionals in response to demands made by the SEND CoP 2015 and how it may impact on partnership working</p>	<p>16 professionals including SENCos, SEND caseworkers, advisors and commissioners, social workers, child psychiatrists</p>	<p>Single, in-depth, Semi structured interviews</p> <p>Cribb and Ball's (2005) ethical framework</p> <p>Uses ethical lenses of goals, obligations and dispositions</p> <p>Data used in the study has been selected from a project that aimed to listen and learn about the early experiences of SEND professionals collaborating under the new Code</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preoccupation with implementing CoP hides deeper unease and doubt • Construct of “good” SENCo who hides complexity, trades in professional certainties and offers straightforward advice • Temptation for professionals to equate ethics with conformity to CoP • Professionals working together in a child-centred way can challenges constructions of professional identities as autonomous experts • SEND caseworkers state they need fewer skills to write plans • Change to target-driven outcomes brings professional uncertainty and need for adjustment • Teacher experiencing intensified demands on partnership working across agencies – which could benefit from ethical knowledge enable negotiating conflict • To enable negotiation of conflicting values, expectations and responsibilities – participants used ethical differentiation to limit moral responsibility and cope with demands – although this is not always possible • Challenge of professionals hold different ethical positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants recruited initially from personal contacts, then using snowballing • Locality of participants not mentioned, only that they were from 4 LAs • Two participants declined to participate and one withdrew, no potential reasons for this are provided • Details of how the interviews were conducted are not provided • No details on how data was collected, handled or stored • No details provided about how questions were generated • Selective data used from an existing project and used in another study by the author • Research mostly focuses on generalisations and not contradictory evidence • The researcher does not mention their own role in the research •

Parental narratives around decision-making

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals learning each other's discourses, systems and practice is possibly being neglected • SENCOs and SEN caseworkers pressure points in the system • Ethical division of labour/professional ethics are socially constructed and linked to role constructions, which are being reconstructed by the code, but ethics is not always considered • Pressures of institutional norms, personal histories and characteristics are justifying through shared decision-making, but also limiting professional power to use their knowledge, experience and skill 	
<p>A tale of three SENCOs, post 2015 reforms</p> <p>Whalley, S</p> <p>Support for Learning, 33(4), 407–428</p>	<p>Investigated the effectiveness of the SENCO role in implementing change following the 2015 CoP</p>	3 SENCOs	Semi-structured interviews	<p>Four key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic help and status – SENCOs had opportunities to voice their role as strategic leaders – 2 out of 3 on SLT • Greatest challenge was time allocated to the SENCO role continues to be a barrier • The mindset of others impacted the effectiveness of the SENCO role • TA associated as “main prop” of inclusion • Teachers were not always accountable for CYP with SEN, leaving SENCO responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCO sample were all new to the role within the last 18 months • Small sample • Localised nature of participants and research • All participants were students on a course the researcher is a tutor • Researcher acknowledges potential responder bias, but relationship not explored further – good bunny syndrome • No suggestions for future research

Parental narratives around decision-making

				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive practice since the 2015 CoP CYP experiences segregation – links to academic focus/results demands, fast pace of CoP changes	
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7.4. Appendix C – Interview guidance sheet

Introduction text

- Journey
- focus decision-making process
- from the earliest point you can remember
- up until point of your decision
- Narrative
- no questions
- no talking me
- continuous account
- shift points as much as you like

Basic phases of NI

1. Preparation
2. Initiation – formulating initial topic for narration
3. Main narrative – no interruptions, non-verbal encouragement – prompt questions only when needed
4. Questioning phase – “What happened then” “tell me more about” “could you explain a little more”
5. NO – opinion/attitude questions, arguing, pointing out contradictions, no why questions, Exmanent into immanent questions
6. Concluding talk

Prompt questions

- is that all you want to tell me?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

General questions/points

- What happened before/then/after
- No opinions attitudes or causes
- Use words of informant

Exmanent points

- the nature and degree of a child’s SEN
- views around mainstream, specialist provision and special schools’
- ability to meet a child’s needs
- previous experience within primary provision
- guidance
- sources of support and advice
- role in decision making
- involvement
- child centred
- local context
- legislation
- assessment
- report influence
- outcomes
- teaching and support
- differentiation
- evidence based
- health and care involvement
- voice of the child – reflected accurately in report

7.5. Appendix D – Outline of research shared with SENCo for recruitment of participants

Lloyd Smith – Trainee educational psychologist

Doctoral research thesis – Overview

Email:

Telephone:

Everyone makes many decisions every day. Everything we say or do is the result of a decision, whether we are conscious of it or not. Some decisions involve a simple choice, whereas other decisions are more complex and challenging to make.

Parents of children with an Education and Health Care Plan are legally entitled to be involved in the decision-making process and can specifically name what school they would like their child to attend. This decision is often a complex one, influenced by many potential factors. This complexity requires parents to take in a lot of information and make judgements about the best educational provision for their child. Understanding how parents navigate this process and make a final decision is the focus of this research.

This research is looking to talk to parents of children with an education and health care plan. Parents involved in the research will be asked some questions and about their experience of selecting a school. It is hoped that this research will provide useful insights into how parents make sense of complexity, what sources of information they feel are influential and how they make final decisions.

7.6. Appendix E – Participant invitation letter**PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

My name is Lloyd Smith and I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London. I am studying for a Professional Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into how parents of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) choose what secondary school their child should attend.

Everyone makes many decisions every day. Some choices are simple, whereas other are complex. Children with an EHCP have complex needs that schools are required to meet. Understanding how parents make sense of these needs and talk about their decision-making journey when choosing a school is the focus of this research.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as I am looking for parents of children with an EHCP who have been involved in the process of choosing a secondary school for their child to attend.

I emphasise that I am not looking for ‘experts’ on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel obligated

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate you will be asked to attend an interview with the researcher. The interview involves being asked questions in an informal-chat-style around your experiences of choosing a secondary school for your child. The interview will last roughly 60 minutes, but this can be shorter or longer based on your needs. The interviews will be audio recorded and can take place at a private location of your choice; please let me know your preference. For example, I am happy to meet you at your home, or I can organise a meeting room at a Norfolk County Council office.

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic. I am very grateful for your participation in my research and thank you for your time and contribution.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will always be respected. Information collected during the interviews will be typed up on a computer and anonymised. No directly identifying reference to your name will be written throughout the research.

Parental narratives around decision-making

You have the right to not answer any of the questions posed during the interview. You may withdraw your participation in the research at any time during the interview. Once the interview is complete, you will be provided with a letter outlining the contact details if you require support or wish to raise any concerns or issues you might have as a result of the interview or research.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

The information you provide will be recorded in audio and written formats. The audio recordings for the interview will only be listened to by the researcher and typed up on a computer. Your name and any other identifiable information will be changed to ensure you will be anonymous. Once anonymised, the interview will only be accessible to colleagues, supervisors and examiners related to the research. The final research paper might include extracts from our interview, but these will be anonymised. The final research paper might also be published in an academic journal.

Audio recordings, notes and contact details will be kept securely on a password protected and encrypted files on the university server and a memory stick for the duration of the research, then destroyed. The anonymised data will be stored securely for a period of 2 years and then destroyed.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Once you have participated in the research, you have until the analysis of the data to inform me that you would like to withdraw your participation from the research. After this point, data will be anonymised and used within the research.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Lloyd Smith

Email:

Parental narratives around decision-making

If you are aware of any other parents who share a similar experience who may like to participate in this research, please feel free to pass my contact details to them, or provide parents details to me.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Pandora Giles. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email:

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email:)

7.7. Appendix F – Sample of notes taken in interview – immanent areas using informant language

Below is an example of notes taken during one of the interviews for this research. The aim of the notes is to record immanent issues raised by the parents during their narrative, combine them with exmanent issues from the literature, to generate questions during the fourth phase of the NI interview. The notes were originally written by hand, but transferred to this electronic document for submission purposes.

- Types of school – offered – what “options”
- Didn’t want to move school – “there until he is 14, but needs to move on” – transition again? Son’s views on decision-making
- “Community based support” – talk to me more about
- EHCP – “build on support” – Do you feel supported? not enough? Area of decision-making?
- “role in decision-making” – Feeling of “choice”
- Outside support – “others?”
- Tell me about the different “involvement of staff”
- “voices heard” – feelings, change, explore
- Authority – attachment
- Pediatrician – “I’d like to say helped” - talk to me more about
- “right thing to say”
- “awful” – feelings – experiences
- “actually work on him” – SEMH aspects, not academic
- “coming to terms with” – EHCP, support, need

7.8. Appendix G – Letter of ethical approval from the university
 School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational
 Psychology

REVIEWER: Stelios Gkouskos

SUPERVISOR: Lemarra Walker and Pandora Giles

STUDENT: Lloyd Smith

Course: Professional Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology

Title of proposed study: Explicit heuristics used by parents of children with an Education and Health Care Plan when making decisions about secondary educational provision

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES

Minor amendments required (for reviewer):

On the participant invitation letter, it states: "Once you have participated in the research, you have until the start of the data analysis to inform me that you would like to withdraw your participation from the research." At this point, the researcher needs to also add the month that the analysis will begin so that participants are better informed about the actual time they have at their availability to withdraw, if they wish to do so.

Major amendments required (for reviewer):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*): Lloyd Smith

Student number: U1724865

Date: 28.03.19

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER (for reviewer)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐

HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐

Parental narratives around decision-making

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☐

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*): Dr Stelios Gkouskos

Date: 20th March 2019

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

7.8.1. Request of title change to the ethics application**REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION****FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS**

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.

By applying for a change of title request you confirm that in doing so the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed then you are required to complete an Ethics Amendments Form.

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

Complete the request form electronically and accurately.

Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).

Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk

Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant: Lloyd Smith

Programme of study: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Parental narratives around decision-making

Name of supervisor: Dr Pandora Giles

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
Old Title: Explicit heuristics used by parents of children with an Education and Health Care Plan when making decisions about secondary educational provision	A slight shift in focus of the research based on the challenges of identifying and eliciting explicit heuristics accurately. Narratives around how parents choose a secondary educational provision for their child with an Education and Health Care plan was identified as a gap in the literature
New Title: Parental narratives around decision-making regarding secondary educational provision for children with an Education, Health and Care plan	

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	x	
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?		x

Student's signature (please type your name): Lloyd Smith

Date: 12.10.2019

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Title changes approved	APPROVED	
Comments		

Reviewer: Glen Rooney

Date: 26/03/2020

7.9. Appendix H – participant consent form**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON****Consent to participate in a research study****Parental narratives around decision-making regarding secondary educational provision for children with an Education, Health and Care plan**

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw; the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name: LLOYD SMITH

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date:

7.10. Appendix I – Demographics form

Demographic monitoring

We want to understand who has participated in this research. That's why we're asking you these questions. We won't share the information you give us with anyone else. We'll use it only to help us to inform the research. If you would rather not answer any of these questions, you don't have to.

Q1. Are you...? ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ I prefer not to say

Q2. Which of these age groups applies to you? Please select one box.

- ☐ 0 - 15 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 65-74 ☐ 85 + over
☐ 16-24 ☐ 35-49 ☐ 60-64 ☐ 75-84 ☐ I prefer not to say

Q3. To which of these ethnic groups do you feel you belong? (Source: 2011 census)

White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British
<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> White & Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/> Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/> White & Black African	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/> African
<input type="checkbox"/> Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/> White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Other*
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> Other*	<input type="checkbox"/> Other*	
<input type="checkbox"/> Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> Arab	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> I prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> Gypsy/Roma			
<input type="checkbox"/> Irish Traveller			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other*			

***Other Ethnic Group** - if your ethnic group is not specified in the list, please describe it here:

Q4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Primary School ☐ University undergraduate programme
☐ GCSEs or equivalent ☐ University postgraduate programme
☐ A Level or equivalent ☐ I prefer not to say
☐ Other, please specify:

Q5. What is your employment status

- ☐ Employed - full time ☐ Employed – part time ☐ I prefer not to say
☐ Unemployed

Q6. Marital status

- ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ In a domestic partnership ☐ Any other marital status, please specify:
☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Prefer not to say

Q7. How many children do you have in total?

Thank you for providing this information

- 7.11. **Appendix J - Analysed transcript example** – highlighting sjuzet, fabula, identity positioning coding and general notes – please double click on image to get full transcript PDF. Key: D= father, M = mother Q= question from researcher, IP = identity position

Interview transcript

1. D. Just to start at the beginning and talk about, you know primary school and where he was with that and his kind of changing needs and stuff like that. And then

M. Yeah, so, so yeah, I think obviously at primary school we got a diagnosis we realised that our child needed a certain amount of help and support, that obviously started us off on the journey of looking at secondary schools and what would be appropriate. I would say we were very much, sort of, quite child-centred in our approach, in the sense that, we were looking for, we weren't just looking for a school. For example, a lot of parents might just look for a school with good exam results. We were looking for a secondary school that could provide good holistic support for him. So, that yes, we were looking at a school where, he could reach his potential, but that they would provide the support to help them reach their potential. And also in relation to his individual personality traits and how we felt, what I mean by that is, so, for example, we thought he might struggle in a huge school. There's not a lot of secondary schools that are small. I felt that if there wasn't the support there he would just fall through the net and I read a lot of evidence around that in terms of, you know, I'm on kind of forum groups and have access to various groups, they're all people who have set these groups up as sort of parents, so that was really important for me in our decision-making. It wasn't just about reading the OFSTED report, it was the whole package. So, looking at secondary schools in the area, I was looking for, we looked at a mixture didn't we. So, looking at mainstream schools and we looked at specialist provision in terms of decision-making as to which school we felt was appropriate. I think we did quite a lot, I, we visited a lot of schools, I certainly did, I visited a lot of schools. So, I looked at the catchment school to see if that was appropriate. I probably looked about seven schools in the end. Lots of, I looked at mainstream schools with SRBs, I looked at mainstream schools that were supposed to have good pastoral care and support, I looked at specialist schools, that was supposed to be aimed at sort of, I know they don't use the terminology now, but high functioning children on the spectrum. We looked at another school, which is kind of, more specialist. We took a whole host of things into account. Do you want me to run through the things we took into account when we looked at the schools? Interject where you want by the way. Well, what would you say in terms of what we took into account because you came to some schools with me.

2. D. One overriding factor was what he wanted, his needs, and what he felt about being in a special school environment, special-needs environment, over a mainstream and he always veered towards mainstream because he didn't want to appear

Note – guidance on how to start

Note – outlining need – appropriate provision, child-centred, holistic, potential, struggle in huge school

Fall through the net

Note – evidence guiding decision-making – the whole package

Vocal support from partner

appearances

7.12. Appendix K – notes and identity positions taken from transcript –

Interview initial stages of analysis example - Identity positioning and additional analysis

The notes and quotes below are the initial impressions transferred from the original transcript in the order that they appeared, preserving the temporal flow. The notes were created through transcription, rereading and relistening to the audio.

The list below includes the notes and multiple identity positioning points identified in the initial stages of analysis. These initial points were then collected together to create overall aspects of the form, content and identity positioning aspects within the narrative (see appendix L for overall narrative analysis notes). These emerging points were then reviewed to establish the holistic form, holistic content and narrative identity aspects of the transcript described in the thesis. The researcher then used the established points of the analysis to review the list below and highlighted each section relevant to a point in the analysis (as shown through the use of colour highlighting below). Once the list below was categorised according to the points in the analysis, this was used to revisit the transcript and locate quotes for use in the thesis.

The original analysis was done manually by hand, which has been transferred to this digital document for submission purposes. Analysis points are highlighted in the following colours:

- Marketisation of education in purple
- (un)supported in green
- Them-and-us in blue
- Where a note covers more than one area, this is indicated by the use of more than one colour

- Fall through the net
- Vocal support from partner
- appearances
- Neurotypical – language
- Social overriding factor
- Crossroads
- Pastoral - language
- Sheppard the children
- Parental insight – showed us where the children could go
- Individual
- Communicating provision
- Quite common – like other children within a specific group
- Insight into current school state – quite difficult, impacting on provision
- Stretched
- Business language – professionalism, consumer, want something, customer relationship
- Imbalanced relationship, don't have to be particularly professional, don't have to sell it
- Pushing and battling, sometimes with SENCo support
- Feel for
- Coping
- Prepare for life

Parental narratives around decision-making

- Neurotypical world
- Prepared to fight, wasn't a great sense of relief, we would have battled
- Most other parents cannot cope with battle, own their own, don't have the tools to argue against the system
- system – us and them
- Support, higher needs, already struggling, content with battle
- Son's school selection – one I want, very rare, not easy, helped decision, buy in
- Parent consequences of making decisions for son
- Positive start of the process
- Specific sources/types of support
- anxious about missing something in retelling – reflect state of making decision, potential of other factors
- feeling very lucky, had to fight hard and evidence everything, and that's without fight to get a private school
- balancing ambition with needs – did want him to be too pushed, always the rub, get really anxious, what every parent wants
- Pushed beyond, massive anxiety
- Not pushy parents – to be honest, support, rather he was happy child
- importance of feelings about a school
- Tribunal push creating a difficult mix of children – ASD kid likes quiet, another kid throws a chair, quite disruptive environment
- social responsibility – community of SEN parents, own assessment of need, empathy
- Interviewee assumes they are missing something – links to overall anxiety around missing something during the decision-making process, want me to lead?
- Reputation
- balancing multiple factors when making decisions
- choice – have to pick or we'll stick you in your local school, it's not child centred, it's all about money
- Surprise someone was brilliant
- Pivotal in supporting me for EHCP
- self-sufficient – I wrote the application, while needing help, left to kind of free roam,
- isolation - left to it by yourself, down to your own determination and your circumstances
- Nothing from county council as far as I'm concerned – expectation, process led by legal documents, cemented, not a consideration, do it because they have to
- IP us and them – they'll be quite happy to have your child stuck in the local school, excluded, can't cope
- Fight tooth and nail, money, excluded, don't have to pay
- parents abandoned and quite cynical
- lifeline – charity amazing, like a lifeline to me, safety net (perceived danger), lucky,
- long journey, quite a lot of battles, a lot of chasing, securing, hitting deadlines which they weren't
- Multiple concerns/issues
- uproot and push him
- shared core values – parents and religious school, with most religions, although parents are not religious, consideration, kindness, school values
- ethos and values the most important - sometimes a little too religious, a little jarring, ethos was strong, push that, no other schools did, religion wasn't a factor at all really, values were a factor, about the community they are going into, treat people as you would want to be treated, embedded in everything, charity work in the community, giving, being kind,
- thoughtful – move to the side, quite orderly – how they think about their child

Parental narratives around decision-making

- Suits him – environment, how it was organised, the way his brain works
- parent happiness – seeing what he was told happen in action
- feel like we've chosen the right school, he's chosen the right school for him
- Bought into – make an effort
- Support – Meh, charity, own impetus, parents, that's about it
- own education in decision-making – education or personality traits
- M – quite tenacious, dad was pushy with school, working-class background, right school for us, best we could do with what we've got
- D – before people took an interest in pushing their kids at school, alien to me, loves arguing, win being getting your child in a school
- I felt really sorry for a parent, really struggling, not a professional, if your educated enough, you can push for diagnosis
- circumstances changed – financial, location, time off work, leaving work, down to one wage, no wage
- Parent arguing and losing temper with SENCo, different temperaments, learn right tools in stable environment
- school didn't teach me how to deal with other people, work did, I switched over roles, nice to clients, careful about what I say, diplomacy skills, keep people on board and on side
- Scape money together
- Angry – by your bloodied fingers, it's not a golden ticket, it is basic
- victimised again as a parent of a SEN child
- Short-sightedness – no big picture, lots of sectors, different industries, only next 4-8 years, not next 20
- Easily got a statement, jump through so many hoops now
- EHCP – only way you've got any power over anything
- don't enjoy process, don't want conflict, try not to, want to work with people to get them offside. Pretty mentally exhausting at time, chase it up
- Industry – not directly paying, indirectly
- made to feel guilty – accessing support, badgering the school, climbing over other people, get to the front, make your voice heard, not a pleasant feeling
- impact of other parental experiences – heart dropped, heart breaking, cannot apply, leapfrogging desperate people. We are desperate, but not that desperate
- achievement getting the right school
- Be careful what you say – contradiction if everyone is careful with what they say
- Signposting, journey toward diagnosis, right places,
- fortunate – live near a teacher, talking to someone in the part
- Left in an ocean of schools
- Early knock backs – delayed process, first big knock back, knocked confidence
- worried – son would be lost and isolated, bitter experience of others, children begin to struggle, add in moving school which generated the worst meltdowns, really scared it would happen again
- EHCP – secure right help and support, acknowledgement and awareness, need motivation to achieve as very quickly realised not an easy one
- Begging bowl, unlock money, experience of signing on, not easy, regardless of what you have paid into the system
- psychological battle, questioning, are you sure you need it, you know they need it, desperation, who wants to go into battle, combative, conflictual situations, forced to, not a nice feeling
- Challenge in variation of professional advice

Parental narratives around decision-making

- devaluing parent opinion, confirmed what we already knew, neurotic, observed before knowing what it was
- led through process – I should think about it as integrated
- Various people, various tiers, don't know who they are, Wizard of Oz, draw the curtains, other people in the background
- previous experience of formal situation helped to prepare, unfortunately
- isolated, nobody else understands, groups are nice
- we're very lucky, understanding family
- groups are female dominated and not always inclusive around men, gender aspect, in person and online, only school pickups
- D – establishing a guy's group – sounded silly, go down the pub and get wasted, discussing emotions maybe difficult, need to get pissed to talk about it, never took off, would be nice to talk about how they feel
- previous living location – established social networks and knowledge as essential part of support, stretched out, connection
- ideas to create connections between parents – coffee morning, create community at secondary school, plug that hole, don't want it to become a tribe, SEN parents congregate – conscious of perception, isolation of the group – like son doesn't want to be different
- benefits of experience – over the years, working as a group, creating a voice to be heard, power
- assumptions – all children have the same as our son, pretty naïve, put right on my assumptions
- Community support – almost like counselling, give you confidence to push forward
- Isolation
- responsibility of parent role- addressing behaviour, shaping them, giving them tools, not given advice, off your own back, couple of sticking points
- parenting – guidance on when to push and pull back – wanting the best for their child, but not at any cost
- responsibility - fulcrum, pivotal bit in their life, not getting advice, is what I am doing damaging, fully rounded adult and understand emotions
- Asked us, targeted, clear analogies
- you know what you want – hard to find all the information you need to make what feels is the right decision to get that outcome
- parental difference – differences of opinion about the process and journey of decision-making
- emotional turmoil, put kid in wrong school, you've screwed everything up for that human being, it's on your shoulders
- acknowledge parent differences – easier for father, complement each other, mother emotional lines, but also quite practical, just what we've got to do, it's not right, I've got the tools to do it, I've just got to get on with it
- difference of opinion of being included in the decision-making process – reflective of the roles they took? Their individual experiences of the process?

7.13. Appendix L - Initial analysis summary points from notes – interview analysis example

Marketisation of education – uneasy relationship – colliding of two worlds (education and business) that can sour easily, sold to – fight for funding and money, benefits those who are financially buoyant, potential for financial impact outside system, expectation around customer service created by business world expected from education, can sour, don't have to want SEN children

- **SENCo** – people don't buy products, they buy people – true for SENCo - SENCo as salesperson, pressure and expectation on SENCo, parents gauging them for qualities, trust, honesty, passionate, committed, accountable, convincing, part of SLT, solid foundation, sell to other staff, professional, genuine, comes through in speech in subtle ways, parents reading them,

(un)Supported

- **EHCP** – legal document, written down, actually do something about it, clout, choice, some reject and encourage challenge, key to open doors, learn language, construct and deconstruct jargon, makes the system accountable, without just the power to be a pain in the bum, tribunal final stage of accountability
- **Ethos and values** – attitude and approach to SEN – strength of coming across, qualities like caring, kindness, fellow pupil, empathy, shared core values between religious school approach and SEN
- **Lack of support** – isolated, victimised as a parent of SEN.
- **Source of support** - SENCo feel compromised, no support or list of specialist schools from council, little direct support parents, focuses mainly on the child
- **Outside support best** – online forums, parent groups, charities, some SENCos, role of luck, off the record teachers, SENCos and professionals – parents need emotional and practical support they get from SEN parent community, sense of social responsibility in SEN parent community
- Pragmatic help from psychologists useful, but varies and can be difficult to challenge/question professionals – they can devalue parent perspective and label as neurotic

Them-and-us – positioning – narrative identity

- **parent and council/health** – council sees children as figure, will only do the basic, not holistic, leaves children vulnerable, lottery, battles, fight for provision and transport, battle for diagnosis, fight for funding and money, no support from council, can't ask council for truth, councils inspected and failing, push kids into schools, preference for mainstream – bit hand off, brushed under the carpet, EHCP helps provide power and accountability from councils, but influenced by health
- **SEN and neurotypical – children and parents** – different communities, treated differently, left on outside, outside of society, SEN kids golden ticket sucking money away, strength in unity – positioned outside

Parental narratives around decision-making

- **Individual perspectives of SEP** – Secondary school a jungle, savage, sensitive kids eaten alive, harder for staff to monitor due to size and potentially related to own child's needs. Reduced parent contact with secondary school community compared to primary – removed, isolated, alone, no feeling of inclusion in process by council, have to self-sufficient, fight and push – positioning themselves with a big decision to make that can affect and “ruin” lives
- **Between parent perspectives** – difference between parents – different roles that complement each other – different perspectives on responsibility
- Father - decision-making easy, barriers put in front the hard part – shift responsibility to the system?
- Mother - long journey with multiple factors to consider, finding information on each can be challenging, drive, motivation and determination to reveal detail, left to charities and anecdotal parent accounts – taking ownership and weight of responsibility?

7.14. Appendix M – Debrief form**Debriefing Form****Researcher:** Lloyd Smith**Project Title:** Parental narratives around decision-making regarding secondary educational provision for children with an Education, Health and Care plan

Everyone makes many decisions every day. Everything we say or do is the result of a decision, whether we are aware of it or not. Parents of children with an Education and Health Care Plan are legally entitled to be involved in the decision-making process of secondary school choice for their child; although research and media reports suggest this is not always as straightforward as it sounds. This decision is often a complex one, influenced by many factors including the specific needs of the child, legislation, political, financial and the local context. These factors in turn are also influenced by a parent's own views and experiences of school. This complexity requires parents to take in a lot of information and make judgements about the best school for their child.

Understanding the journey parents go on and their experiences of the process is an under-researched topic in the literature. The specific details and aspects influencing school choice is well researched, but understanding how parents make sense of it all is not. In addition, the introduction of the Education, Health and Care plan in 2014 has changed the process, yet little is currently known about how this has affected the decision-making process from a parental perspective.

This research aimed to ask parents about their experiences of the decision-making process around secondary school provision. The method used to explore and analyse the interviews is called narrative analysis. This method aims to elicit parental narratives through the stories they tell, how they tell it, the language they use and how they have made sense of the decision-making process and justification of school choice. It is hoped that this research will provide useful insights into their decision-making journey in the current context of EHCPs. The research also hopes to gain additional insights into what functions language performs when parents talk about making decisions.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to ask me now or contact me in the future by email at [.....](#). You can also contact my supervisor (Dr Pandora Giles) for further questions or comments at [.....](#)

Thank you for your participation!